

BRITAIN'S BEST PC GAMES MAG

MECHS APPEAL!

PCZONE

ISSUE 174 DECEMBER 2006

EXCLUSIVE REVIEW!

BATTLEFIELD 2142

Future shock! Is
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BRITAIN'S BEST PC GAMES MAG

PCZONE

[21m]

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BATTLEFIELD 2142

A clash of the titans, a mangling of mechs and a decent server browser? Praise be!



NEVERQUEST 151

"I find myself stuck up a rusty passage where I come under attack from a Volkswagen"



THE GREATEST GAMES YOU'VE NEVER PLAYED 52

SOME GEMS WERE NEVER LOVED. PC ZONE PUTS RIGHT WHAT ONCE WENT WRONG...

WHAT'S ON THE COVER?



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70 DARK MESSIAH

Too busy? PC ZONE in 56 words... Steve heads off to the future, but before that, there's all manner of jollity: Log offends Jupiter, Andy gets stepped on by a giant spider and Suzy asks stupid questions about giraffes to very important people. Later on, Steve writes a feature in Freeplay, but will he ever shut up about it? Not yet he hasn't...



20 SECONDS TO COMPLY

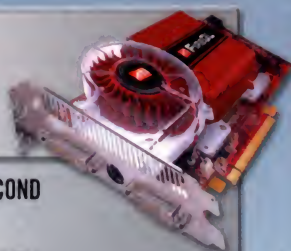
IT'S NO COINCIDENCE that this issue proudly displays the second mech we've had on the cover of PC ZONE this year – we love games with robots. Whether they're stomping around killing units with big guns (*Battlefield 2142*), or stomping around killing units with lasers shooting out of their eyes (*Supreme Commander*), you can't help but adore those cute 'n' clunky machines of destruction.

We had our doubts about *Battlefield's* move into a make-believe future, but the hulking metal monstrosities are one of the game's major triumphs – if we could only get near them without being crushed, we'd give them a manly hug. Check out our exclusive review of *BF2142* on page 62.

Supreme Commander meanwhile, like its robots, is making great strides, and our first hands-on didn't disappoint – apart from our Andy's 'embarrassing' incident, which you can read on page 22. However, if you're looking for non-mechanised thrills, we have a cracking issue for reviews, with our no-bullshit verdicts on *Dark Messiah*, *Just Cause*, *Gothic 3*, *FIFA 07* and *DEFCON*. If you still have time after digesting that little lot, don't miss The Greatest Games You've (Probably) Never Played (p52), which is great, apart from the lack of robot-powered games. But why no *MechWarrior* title? Pah. I eagerly await the day we're all replaced by androids...

Jamie Sefton

Jamie Sefton, editor

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Has the *Might & Magic* universe spat out a bloody chunk of gaming excellence? *ZONE* locks swords...

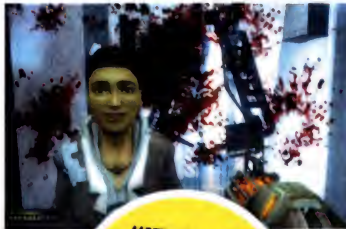
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"IT GAVE ME ORANGE! I WANTED LEMON-LIME!"

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NEXT STAR WARS GAME



THE ULTIMATE QUOTE QUIZ! 20

FREEPLAY/FREWARE

Freeware

Steve Meyerly is married to the free

TORIBASH

No, we're not having a go at David Cameron.

YOUR attention please, freeware megalomaniacs!

LEGEND OF SHADOW

When the sun sets, the darkness begins.

SWARM RACER

Bring the terror to the track.

WARGAME OF THE MONTH

Microsoft's Power 3

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Say a big hello to *Toribash*, the turn-based beat 'em up that's made the world a brighter, more violent place...

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UPFRONT



MEET THE TEAM

And join in our amazing lunchtime adventures...

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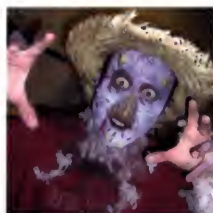
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PAVEL BARTER

Man of many talents

AGE: Younger than Highlander

LIKES: HP's All Day Breakfast

DISLIKES: The egg bits

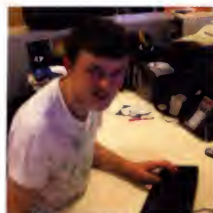
FANCIES: Excessive plastic surgery

FAVOURITE GAME: *Deus Ex*

PLAYING NOW:

Prey, Oblivion, Just Cause

Pavel is a man of terrifying talents. Not only can he knit words into wonderful article scarves, he's part of pop outfit The West Seventies (myspace.com/thewestseventies). When not producing the most beautiful prose and music this grubby world can muster, he's being taught by Pancho from Dirty Sanchez how to "suck shit from a rabbit's arsehole", and appearing as a chicken zombie in the soon-to-be-acclaimed Troma film *Poultrygeist*. Pavel's life has been cited by psychologists as the main reason for depression among people who meet him.



ANDY ROBINSON

Staff Writer

Andy's lunching habits are shrouded in total secrecy. His excellence at strategy games suggest that he lives only on a diet of tactics. Which are like Tic Tacs, only a bit bigger and see-through.

WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING:

Psychonauts



JAMIE SEFTON

Editor

Ever a man of the people, Jamie balances his lofty position with his Northern credentials by swilling pints of white truffle oil and limiting his Elizabethan ruffs to a diameter of three meters.

WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING:

Quake 4, TIE Fighter



STEVE HOGARTY

Staff Writer

During his trips to Nando's, Steve has eaten over 100 chicken legs. One day, he hopes he'll eat a leg that matches one in his stomach, and his stomach will make a special sound and unlock a bonus level.

WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING:

Battlefield 2142



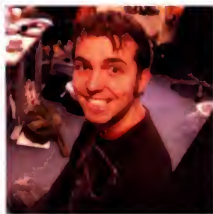
JON 'LOG' BLYTH

Staff Writer

Log has developed his range of desktop condiments to include soy sauce, salad cream, balsamic vinegar and hot pepper sauce. The salad cream may be off, but he's too scared to open it to find out.

WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING:

Tribes: Vengeance, Uplink



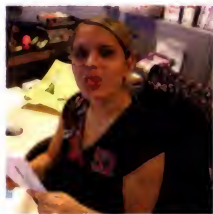
WILL PORTER

Deputy Editor

When not tucking into one of the delicious lunches his girlfriend makes, Will can be found foraging in the baskets at the International Cheese Shop for the last Blue Shropshire and Salad.

WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING:

Tomb Raider: Legend



SUZY WALLACE

Reviews Editor

Suzy, ever the innovator, introduced the idea of bringing back a lasagne from M&S and microwaving it. There's now a new era of economy decadence, and meaty up the air around *DJ* magazine.

WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING:

Guild Wars: Factions

STUFF THAT HAS HELPED US THIS MONTH... Love, compassion and the unquenchable spirit of humanity (ie nothing in particular)
STUFF THAT HASN'T HELPED US THIS MONTH... Crap MMOs, late code galore and the EA Downloader, again...

STUFF WE'VE BEEN TALKING ABOUT...

PUPPETRY OF THE VENUS 58 Mins The 'yeppeyp' Martians from Sesame Street. They're brilliant

THE SPIRALLING COST OF ELECTRICITY 15 Mins Unplug that USB lamp, there's an economy drive on

MORK & MINDY 7 Mins When Mork meets Robin Williams: Log hates it, Steve loves it

WII WII WII ALL THE WAY HOME 83 Mins Pre-orders down, not long to go. Hnnng!

THE CAT CAME BACK 44 Mins It just wouldn't stay away

STEPHEN FRY 80 Mins He may be a bit bipolar, but he's still as lovely as a button

MONDAY'S CHILD 23 Mins Apparently Dale's full of woe, and Clare's full of grace. Right

HELIUM 25 Mins It all comes from a place in Texas. You didn't know?

WILL'S SHIRT 22 Mins Had to be Photoshopped to make it look like he'd ironed it

EA DOWNLOADER 45 Mins Makes Steam look like a seamless dream

WIN!

This month's Tiny Compy has Little Man Syndrome, and started a drunken brawl with the National Lottery in the Groucho Club. The Times Crossword had to step in and put our poor wee fella in a taxi. Tiny Compy 172 was won by Mr N Jesson, who answered correctly with Vanilla Ice, and should call us if he doesn't receive something soon. Send this month's answer to Tiny But Proud Compy (174), PC ZONE, Future Publishing, 2 Balcombe Street, London NW1 6NW.

GENERAL COMPETITION TERMS & CONDITIONS: 1. Only completed entries received before the closing date will be considered. 2. Winners will be notified by post. 3. No cash alternative. 4. Prizes not necessarily as shown. 5. No correspondence will be entered into. 6. The editor's decision is final. 7. Responsibility cannot be accepted for lost or undelivered entries. 8. Competitions are not open to readers outside the UK or employees of Future or its affiliated companies, their families, agents or anyone professionally connected with the competition. Phew!

LETTERS

Got an issue you want to rant about? Tell *Jamie Sefton*...



I LOVE VISTA!

Call me a mentalist, but I'm really looking forward to the release of Windows Vista, as featured in issue 173. Windows XP has been a vast improvement over previous operating systems from Microsoft regarding games, but there are still times when it crashes. The promise that Vista will be a more stable gaming platform with easier installation, have amazing next-gen graphics surpassing anything on PS3 or Xbox 360 via DirectX 10 and be able to seamlessly link up with other platforms such as mobile phones and the new Microsoft Zune player is extremely exciting. I know I'll be upgrading as soon as it's available next year – roll on Vista!

Jonathan Staines



Steve Hogarty.



Stingray Timmins.

Have you thought about becoming a PR for Microsoft, Jonathan? As we said in the feature, Windows Vista has the potential to be a fantastic upgrade for PC gamers, with amazing titles such as *Crysis* lined up to take full advantage. However, there are also potential pitfalls with the delayed launch in Q1 2007, such as the fact it'll be released in five different flavours and that the rubbish-looking *Shadowrun* is meant to be a showcase for PC/Xbox 360 integration.

my client, or could put me in touch with someone else who's willing? All that's required is that you write a short specification outlining the need for a games tutorial disc, and then for me to send you my tutorial once finished, and you write a short evaluation of it and list any improvements that could be made.

Robert McCrea

Great idea Robert – an 'A' level in *Counter-Strike*! And they have the audacity to suggest that exams aren't as tough as they used to be...

Letter of the month

Adult gaming

I was reading the article on *Hitman: Blood Money* in issue 172 and I was struck by the response caused by the ad campaign with the dead woman lying on a bed. The media seem to have remained stuck on the idea that gamers are just little boys and spotty teens vulnerable to the evil corruption of games.

I'm glad the games industry has grown up – I want to play quality games and enter worlds where there are moral grey areas, where sex, drugs, violence and other adult themes are shown and put into context. A clear system of telling the public what's in it is required, but if you're offended, don't buy it – leave those of us who do alone to enjoy the things that we cannot, will not and do not want to do in real life. It's just a game, after all.

Ben Adams

Amen to that Ben – have a graphics card. I was contacted recently by a TV company producing a report on videogames, and they asked me, seriously: "If you just leave your avatar in a MMOG without playing it, do they slowly die?" Ignorance is rife, hence all the ridiculous media scare stories. We'll have more in a future *ZONE*.

LOOKEE-LIKEE

Is it just me or does your staff writer Steve Hogarty share more than a passing resemblance to Neighbours character Stingray Timmins?

Nic Maher

Can't see it myself, Nic.

BLOODY STUDENTS

I'm currently studying Multimedia at 'A' level and have to design some form of multimedia tutorial interactive disc. I'm using PC gaming as my area, and will be designing a disc on playing and mastering *Counter-Strike: Source*.

I was wondering whether you'd be

SPECIAL EDITION

With games becoming more influenced by Hollywood movies, whether it be in story or style (*The Godfather* and *Scarface*, as well as Eidos's forthcoming Michael Mann-esque *Kane & Lynch: Dead Men*), I'm surprised that developers haven't followed the film industry one step further and started to include DVD-type extras with their new titles.

It would be great if games included behind-the-scenes documentaries charting their development. Collector's Editions would keep both gamers and the curious (me!) satisfied, as well as help educate those who want to work in the industry.

As an English teacher, creating media lessons focusing on games, their development and cultural impact would be huge and the kids would love it.

Kevin Maund

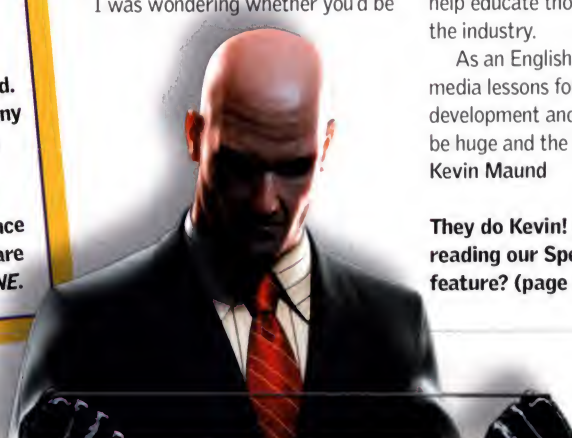
They do Kevin! Have you not been reading our Special Edition review feature? (page 152). As well as

WIN!



ONE OF THESE!

This magazine would be nothing without you. And this page would be, well, an embarrassingly blank space, devoid of love and devotion. Don't let it happen – write in, and if we deem your letter to be the sparkliest, we'll sprint round to your house with a brand new Connect3D X1600 Pro 512MB graphics card. Or we'll put it in the post – one of the two.



SAY WHAT?

"Online friends want the best for you, offer advice and provide suppressive fire as you arm the bomb"

But real friends are handy to have too, reckons reader Smo.

special box sets, companies such as Valve are also now releasing commentaries as standard with some games such as *Half-Life 2: Episode One*. Get those lessons planned now! You'll be the most popular teacher that's ever lived.

A LOAD OF CRAP

Damn you Sefton! Five minutes ago I was chortling away to myself about the sad acts that write in to your magazine, and now I'm one of them. While enjoying a *Brothers In Arms* article at my desk and eating my lunch, an avalanche of paper fell from between the covers – unlimited DVDs, subscriptions and a bloody gambling guide! As I bent down to pick them up I headbutted a bottle of coke, sending it flying. I've now lost a pack of Post-It notes, a fancy pen drive I

got from the States and about six hours extra work as I try to salvage what I can. Thanks. Please feel free to up the charge of a few of the mags and print 'Now free of crap you don't want!' on the cover. I will happily pay a bit extra for one of those.

Bob Godbolt

Sad acts eh? It's a good job we don't print addresses Bob, or you might have a mob of angry ZONE letter-writers knocking on your door. Like most mags, we accept money for companies to put 'promotional items' between the pages, but feel free to recycle them. Hopefully the 'not crap' exclusive *Half-Life 2* art print, free with this issue, will make up for your terrible loss.

REAL LIFE VS GAME LIFE

As gamers, we've all been told at some point in our lives that we should get off our arse and do something real. My parents are always telling me to get outside, read a book, practice guitar. Why waste my time playing games?

I ask why I can't play games, and they say because it's not a good skill. That's a matter of opinion, but because

I'm 14 and they're my parents, they have their way and I end up outside. Gamers have just as much skill in their games as an avid reader has in reading. Gaming is an escape from reality – but then isn't reading? No, reading develops a skill – but playing games doesn't?

What about friends? Apparently, a real friend isn't as valuable as your clan-mate because "you don't know them in real life". So? They're still a person, a real person who's interested in you. They want the best for you, offer advice and provide suppressive fire as you arm the bomb. A gaming relationship is a lot easier to keep. You don't know each other's friends, you can bitch about whoever you want and it won't come back to you. That's not to say only have online friends, because that's really sad. But society says that you have to know the person in real life for it to be real.

Real friends and hobbies are great, but your gaming hobbies, skills and friends are too. Remember this when society gets you down – you're a really cool gamer and they're ignorant.

Smo

Eloquently put Smo – now tidy your room and do your homework...

Greatest PC game lines – what made you laugh? Mine is: "Who's a figgy piggy? Oink oink oink!", from the wonderful, effervescent *Psychonauts*.
speakafreaka

Who can forget "Mein lieben!"? Those long corridors, that big chaingun and loads of Nazis... Happy days.
Csdaveuk

There was a great bit of dialogue in *Discworld*. The two barbarians: "Ja, we kill a little here, a little there, just indoors."
"Ah, I tink maybe you kill in street too."
"Ok, Ja. I kill in street too. Only not much."
Maybe you had to be there...
cjw101

Best quote is in *Duke 3D*: "It's time to kick ass and chew bubblegum. And I'm all outta gum." It may have been ripped off from *They Live*, but Duke delivers it way better than Roddy Piper...

INS_tha_rebel
Join in the forum fun at www.pczone.co.uk

My, they look good on the dancefloor.



PINK FREUD

After our metallic Dr Jung wiped his memory banks in a tryst with a babe magnet, we fashioned Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) from flesh, fabric and pins. With his research team of 700 toy poodles, Pink Freud exists only to answer your questions...

DEAR DR FREUD,

Q I'm a big fan of science-fiction, so when I saw *Face Of Mankind* (issue 155) and *Imperator* (issue 157), I was very excited. Yet I haven't seen any reviews or new previews for either. Has something gone wrong?
F-6

A Good evening, F-6. What a beguiling name, and how charming of you to write. I passed on your query to my research team, then settled down to a brisk nap. However, those infernal chatter-hounds phoned me back barely 12 hours later, to say that *Face Of Mankind* – a game set in the future, of all places – went to beta in March of 2005. It's free to download with a monthly 10-Euro subscription, and has suffered from a hugely mixed

reception that ranges from "intriguing yet frustrating" to "worst MMO ever". Their official website is at www.fomportal.com.

You also ask about *Imperator*, which is a little bit cheeky. Two for the price of one, I ask you! I shall indulge you, however, as you have kind eyes. It literally cripples me with sadness to have to inform you that the development of *Imperator* has been postponed. Mythic Entertainment, fronted by Mark 'I remember when this were all MUDs' Jacobs, has swivelled its gigantic rheumy eye to stare at the production of *Warhammer Online: Age Of Reckoning* instead. A worthy distraction, you might say; as a sci-fi fan, you might not. I don't know you, sir, and as sure as I am that you're quite lovely, it's time for my pre-supper snooze.

Send your gaming questions and queries to letters@pczone.co.uk

LETTERS



@ letters@pczone.co.uk

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PC ZONE Around the World

UP THE MOUNTAIN SPECIAL!



We want photos of you with PC ZONE in the most exotic or inappropriate locations. Candid celeb shots count double. Every one printed wins a prize!

A PENNY MORE

I noticed that issue 173 ran a two-page advert for a game called *Lord Arch*. Is this a brand-new MMO featuring the disgraced ex-Tory politician Lord Archer, or have you simply got the pages the wrong way around for an *Archlord* advert?

Steve Hague

No you're right Steve, it's a new MMO based on Jeffrey Archer. One person is chosen at random to be 'Lord Arch' for a month, and they then have the power to write low-brow plays and novels, get involved in a libel case over allegations they had sex with a prostitute, and then spend the rest

of their time locked up for perjury in a virtual Hollesley Bay open prison. Could be a winner.

CALM DOWN!

I'm just writing to share my enthusiasm and my great anticipation. I've got nobody else to share these things with, because nobody I know would be remotely interested, so I'm going to write to my favourite magazine in the hope that others will read my words and share my feelings.

I'm talking about *Medieval II: Total War*. Is anyone out there looking forward to it more than me? The graphics alone will be amazing, with each soldier different from the next – never mind behaving as

individuals, they even look different from one another! You've told us that they'll fight and die in animations that aren't just the same repetitive sword swing and there'll be blood spatter – now we'll know who was at the back afraid of getting dirty the whole time. Apparently, the map will open up to the Americas and thank you so much, the assassination films will be brought back. They say there'll be enough variations that you'll rarely see the same one twice.

What I have to wonder is whether we'll see some form of real-time naval battles this incarnation? Since reading the last issue of PC ZONE, I've kept returning to look at the advert on the back cover, just to look and imagine. If there has ever been a game that I've thought it's worth upgrading my system for, or even throwing it away to start afresh, then this is it!

Alex Windel

We share your enthusiasm Alex – while I can confirm there aren't naval battles in the next *Total War*, the game is sure to be a must-have title. We'll have the definitive review next issue. **PCZ**

TXT ZONE

Hey pcz tell the twatty bollockses at EA to hurry up an release spore. i wanna create a fing dat shits out its gob. ps. spore i love u really.

my mrs is proper kicking off! I've been off from work for 13 days and 11 of those i've spent playing cod2. I think she hates me. :(cool mag. logan

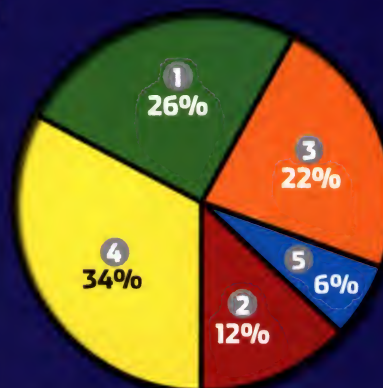
no more E3? always looked forward to the Zone drunken reports. can we have another playboy mansion visit!? GWizz

TEXTS SHOULD BE NO MORE THAN 160 CHARACTERS LONG – ANY MORE, AND THEY'LL BE CUT SHORT!
To txt (text) this magnificent gaming rag, send your mssgs (messages) to 87103, putting PCZTXT at the beginning of the message, then leaving a space, then continuing with your text – and don't forget to include your name.

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The Big Question

What's the next *Battlefield* game after *BF2142*?



- 1 Battlefield 2242: 26%
- 2 Battlefield 1342: 12%
- 3 Battlefield: Mordor: 22%
- 4 Need For Battlefield: 34%
- 5 Battlefield 3: 6%

21ST CENTURY WEAPONS FOR 21ST CENTURY WARS

THE FIGHT TO SECURE TOMORROW'S MOST EXPLOSIVE WARZONES BEGINS THIS SEPTEMBER



Licensed hardware from top defense contractors



Troops gain rank and stay with you throughout the game



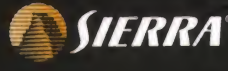
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COVER STORY

BATTLEFIELD 2142

Exclusive review! We go straight to the cold, metallic heart of the latest in DICE's mighty *Battlefield* series...



IT'S ONLY BEEN just over a year since *Battlefield 2* dragged us out of World War II and demanded we fly around in modern-day helicopters and jets. It took us a while to get used to it, but we were excited about the change. Now DICE are flexing their grabbing fists once again, while pointing at the future and nodding, their devilish eyes locked on ours. They're planning on launching us hundreds of years into the future for a second time, into a world populated by giant, walking tanks, massive floating motherships and next-gen weaponry. Are you ready for it? Let's do the timewarp again...

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PCZONE

UPFRONT

Everything that matters in the world of PC gaming

CRAPPY ENDINGS

WHAT WITH ALWAYS being stylishly late to the party, I've only just completed *Tomb Raider: Legend*. And what a shite experience it was. Not the playing of it – great fun – but the general feeling of bemusement and 'is that it?' that hit me upon its completion. I'm not sure quite what I was expecting, but a shit boss in the form of a (spoiler!) sexy woman who can (spoiler!) inexplicably turn into a monster getting her comeuppance, before Lara says something like "The mystery isn't over! To the museum!", doesn't exactly offer much reward for eight-odd hours of dedication.

Admittedly, it's no *Call Of Duty 2*: "Hooray! We're in a town!" "Have a medal!" And it's certainly no *Far Cry*: "Hooray! I've shot a man on the floor!" "Well done. Have a confusing cut-scene." And thankfully it's no *KOTOR II*: "Nothing I've done means anything, as this game is clearly unfinished!" "Yep. Have a debilitating kick in the balls."

I also cannot stand – I repeat, *cannot stand* – cliffhanger endings. After a half-hour of *EastEnders* strife, I don't mind a few drumbeats and a look of shock on Pat Butcher's face – but in *Prey* and *Half-Life 2*? Come on! I paid for you, and played you to your very end – if you can't give anything more, then at least give me closure! I suppose next year's *Lost* game will hardly buck the trend either, will it? Unless... Hang on. "Sefton? What are you doing with a small lady's revolver in your handbag? What? That's not true! Pat, do something! Argh!" *Dum dum dum da da dumdumdum...*

Will Porter

Will Porter, deputy editor

ANY PORTAL IN A STORM

Exclusive! ZONE talk to Kim Swift, the lady whose *Portal* technology will blow you away

IT'S A RAGS-to-riches story. Well, sort of. They were a group of happy-go-lucky students who would happily spend their evenings pushing each other around in trolleys and tucking into whatever the Seattle variation on Snakebite-and-black is, before Valve descended onto their end-of-year show and pounced on portal-based gem *Narbacular Drop*. Fifteen minutes into their demonstration and Gabe Newell had tasked them to render it in Source, a request that designer Kim Swift states left them "just stood in the parking lot drooling a little bit and looking confused".

But how do you go about designing a game that's so mind-boggling in its use of portals? "The way we design our puzzles is that we all sit down together as a team – the artists, programmers, level designers – and pretty much decide goals for each level," explains the never-not-smiling Ms Swift. "We'll want the player to use particular objects – say, a box to open a door – or to use a 'fling', which is when you put one portal on the wall and one on the floor and you use your momentum from standing high up on a ledge to gain acceleration to toss yourself out of the other portal. Then we figure out the layout of a level – we draw it out on the whiteboard and then one of us goes and designs it."

Portal takes place in a test facility called the Aperture Science Laboratories, and each puzzle (or 'chamber' as Valve call them) is connected by a lift and a laser beam that ensures you don't carry any objects with you (and, as the cheerily batty computer voice will inform you, may leave a

slight taste of blood in your mouth should you have any fillings). What's more, you play a character that Swift describes as being "new to the *Half-Life* universe". So how does the story fit in? "Uh, no comment. We've definitely thought about how the storyline's going to fit in with the main characters in the *Half-Life* universe – Gordon's *Half-Life* world," explains Kim while shaking her head. "But there's nothing we can really disclose at this point..."

Well, OK, but can you reveal whether it ties into the original *Half-Life* or *Half-Life 2*? See, when you play it, it does feel as though you're back in Black Mesa, what with the computer voices and the scientific setting... "No comment! I really do want to talk about it, but I can't!" Well, all right. But ZONE are placing good money on there being a "You're in Black Mesa! OMFG!" sign towards the end.

With Valve support including providing some cracking witticisms in the script (plus an odd penchant for cake) and some truly awesome music, we can already tell you that *Portal* is nothing short of a triumph. But the all-important question is, if you had a portal gun in real life, just how would it help?

"Putting a portal here at work and one at home would be nice," laughs Swift. "Actually, I think there was a *Simpsons* episode where Homer had a portal and it went straight into the refrigerator from the couch or something like that. That would be nice, too." Never a truer word spoken.



Ms Swift, keeper of many secrets.



Narbacular Drop: the genesis of Portal.



Portals: flavour of the scientific month.

APERTURE TEASER Can't wait for Portal? Try the viral website!

We don't want to give away too much, but if you haven't already, then visit www.aperturescience.com – type 'login', then your name and the password 'portal'. It works a bit like DOS, really – next, just tap in 'apply'. What follows is brilliantly bonkers, with cake and bereavement counselling at its close.

STOP PRESS!

FAR CRY 2 LEAK

Following the discovery of two gigs of artwork on a Ubisoft public ftp, the existence of *Far Cry 2* can now be confirmed. Settings: deserts, cities, jungle.

SPLINTER CELL 5 LEAK

Following that same discovery, the existence of a fifth *Splinter Cell* can be confirmed. *Splinter Cell: Conviction* will be partly set in Washington, DC.

NEW BETHESDA GAME!

And it's an FPS! Don't miss next month's PC ZONE for the exclusive on the brand-new shooter from the makers of *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion*.

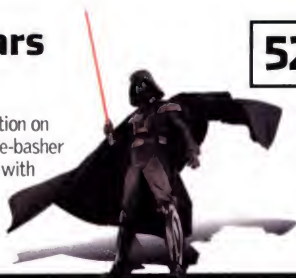
22 Supreme Commander

Chris Taylor, the loudest man in gaming, looks on as *ZONE* play-test his latest masterpiece.



46 Star Wars hype

Rampant speculation on the next-gen Force-basher served piping hot with bantha-butter.



52 The 10 greatest games you've never played

Body possession, freedom-fighting, spying, bloodsucking, racketeering, racing, photo-taking, skiing and computer hacking. And in that order.



A scientific cube in the right place will enable your escape.



Looks confusing, but just wait till you play it.

TELL ALL YOUR LEGO FRIENDS

LEGO Batman swoops into view



CLEVER JOURNALISTIC BURROWING has revealed that the next game from the LEGO joy department at Traveller's Tales will be based on Batman, though whether it'll joyously pluck baddies from the history of the DC franchise or follow the plot of the new films remains to be seen. Some things are rock solid, though: a LEGO Batmobile, LEGO Batarangs, a LEGO Arkham Asylum and a cast of characters who smile all the time along with the Joker. Can't wait for those wonderful toys...



"This is more than anyone can bear, but we will persevere."

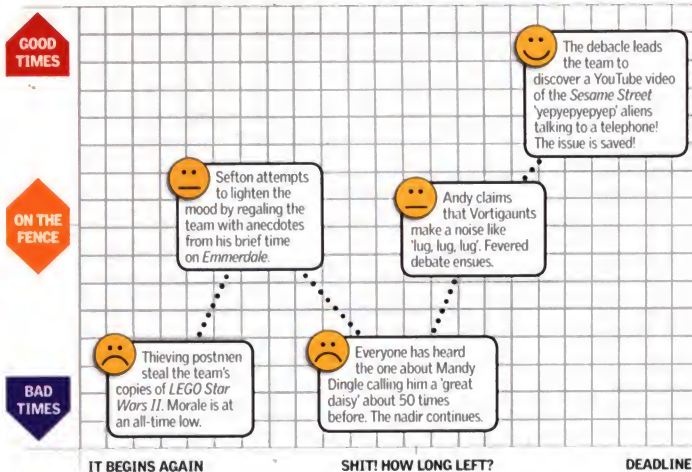
The Freeman must hug me! Valve unveils 2006's Xmas must-have

PORTAL? BAH! HALF-LIFE? Meh! The most exciting thing we saw on our latest trip to Valve's Seattle HQ was this new toy in the *Half-Life 2* cuddly critters line, the plush Vortigaunt. Sadly, it doesn't belt out classic lines like "This is the Freeman" or mutter mystic encouragement, but we're sure if you stand on some carpet and rub it really hard, you'll be able to give someone a tiny electric shock from its hands.

STUFF

Majesco have announced that criminally under-appreciated platformer *Psychonauts* is to be sold on Steam, sometime shortly after you're reading this. The move is part of a deal that also sees fellow Majesco titles *BloodRayne* and *Advent Rising* arriving on the service. In related news, *Psychonauts* developers Double Fine have revealed they're working on a new game with publisher VU Games. We await with much expectation.

LIFE IS A ROLLERCOASTER



WAR OF THE WHIRLED

Blu-ray vs HD DVD will be the mother of all format showdowns. But where should PC gamers stand?



Reporter
Pavel Barter

or another Saturday night in Baghdad, but the prologue of the next great technology war, which is set to change

THE BATTLE LINES are drawn, artillery is stockpiled and troops squat nervously in their bunkers. It's not a *Call Of Duty* deathmatch

life as you know it. The impending conflict between Blu-ray and HD DVD – both seeking to become the next generation of DVD – is shaping up to be a battle of kick-ass proportions, much like VHS vs Betamax in the 1980s. Back then, VHS captured the flag – but where should you lay your bets today?

The stakes are huge. Either Sony (chief developer of Blu-ray) or Toshiba (HD DVD) will reap a fortune if their candidate becomes the next industry standard, while the loser will suffer in the manner of post-World War II Germany. But although most attention has focused on swanky new video players, the PC industry has emerged as a crucial battlefield in the fight for supremacy. Why? Because – ahead of manufacturers of consumer electronics and game consoles – PC makers are set to provide around 50% of next-gen DVD players. In other words, you, dear reader, will play a pretty big part in deciding the victor.

TWO TRIBES

The good news is this: whoever wins, PC games will prosper. Joe McCrossan is senior manager of research and standardisation at Panasonic's Hollywood Laboratory; a loyal Blu-ray manufacturer. "When Blu-ray becomes popular on PC and developers start to distribute PC games using the format, the advantages will be similar to those of PS3 games," he says. "That is, Blu-ray offers capacity that game developers can utilise to store huge amounts of data, more than is currently possible.

"This enables game developers to design huge gameworlds, using high-resolution textures, high-definition video and many graphical assets, without being limited by the capacity of the media on which the game is distributed. Furthermore, every Blu-ray disc has a 'hard coat', which means that the disc is resistant to scratches, marks, fingerprints, dust etc. Game discs will

be far less susceptible to damage than current DVD or CD media."

In contrast to Panasonic, Microsoft is supporting HD DVD. "Where HD DVD shines is in the delivery of high-resolution video and audio content, along with interactive features," says Kevin Unangst, director of Games for Windows at Microsoft. "As HD DVD gains more acceptance and consumer adoption, the additional capacity and HD audio and video capabilities may radically change the PC gaming experience in ways we haven't even imagined.

"The advantages of HD DVD are high-quality audio and video, proven manufacturability and a much more reasonable price point. More capacity means more room for cinematics and other features, but it remains to be seen how the gaming industry takes advantage of the additional space and HD audio and video."

Another Microsoft spokesperson, Wayne Hickey, explains how the firm is gearing up for the new technology. "Microsoft are working closely on playback solutions (Sonic, InterVideo etc), and have been doing considerable HD DVD infrastructure work for Windows Vista, including drivers, file system, codecs and other components that ISVs can leverage for their own playback solutions."

HI-RES AHoy

Both formats are like Arnie compared to the Danny DeVito of current DVDs. Both will decode and present multiple hi-res formats – 720p (1,280 horizontal lines by 720 vertical lines) and 1080i and 1080p (1,920 x 1,080) – and will require substantial CPU and graphics performance, not previously available on desktop PCs. Of course, HD razzmatazz can only be enjoyed in conjunction with compatible TVs or monitors.

So you can expect grander textures, higher-resolution playback and a giant leap towards photo-realistic graphics. The immense storage capacity of high-





def DVDs will also help developers, explains Shayne Herrera, art director at Cryptic Studios. "As anyone who's played *City Of Heroes* knows, the conventional methods for storage tend to require the user to install data off multiple discs. The move into the next generation of DVDs will alleviate that. We can focus on putting more data onto one disc, thus making the installation process easier for the user.

"It's estimated that the data transfer rate for HD DVD is over three times faster than conventional DVDs. That has Cryptic Studios' attention. We're very interested in the ability to fit more data onto a disc, have that data install three times faster and only require one disc instead of four. In the long run, the consumer wins."

FILLING THE SPACE

Will the games themselves become bigger? Tim Rance, Lionhead's chief technology officer, reckons not. "That would be too costly and is not really what gamers are looking for, but [the additional available capacity] will be used to enhance graphics and audio, with higher-resolution textures, more environmental audio and, to a lesser extent, more geometry and animation. Rather boringly, we may also find that publishers use that extra space to cram more language versions onto the same disc to save on manufacturing costs."

Wisely or unwisely, big business has already started taking sides. Hollywood big shots such as Disney and MGM and technology giants such as Samsung, Dell

and Philips are rooting for Blu-ray, while Paramount, Universal and Warner Bros are backing HD DVD. Games companies have been a little slower in pledging allegiance, although EA and Vivendi Universal are siding with Sony's format (mainly due to its inclusion in PS3).

However, most game publishers are awaiting the outcome of the war from the sidelines – an example best followed by you. At present, PCs equipped with Blu-ray or HD DVD cost so much that your grandchildren will probably still be making repayments, and next-gen DVD tech only functions with monitors or HD TVs with HDMI or DVI connections, which means more cost. Even next-gen proponents admit that, for now, it's a waiting game.

"For the first few years, the effect will be limited, because PC game developers will continue to distribute games on media which is supported almost universally by the PC platform, as in DVD or CD," says Joe McCrossan.

Kevin Unangst adds: "Over time, the additional capacity of HD DVD will be helpful – but for today's games, we're still finding that the capacity of a standard DVD is sufficient."

FIGHT TO THE DEATH

OK, so Blu-ray offers higher capacity, while HD DVD is cheaper and easier to produce, but overall, these two formats are the Mary-Kate and Ashley Olsen of technology. Joe Lieberman of Matrix Games, creators of *Panzer Command*, concludes: "In any battle for supremacy between formats, the victor always

Scores on the doors

Here's how the two next-gen rivals stack up...

	Blu-ray	HD DVD
Creator	Sony (and others)	Toshiba (and others)
What's in a name?	Sounds like a weapon from <i>Buck Rogers</i> , or maybe a porn vid	Was previously known as the 'Advanced Optical Disc' – just as dull
Capacity	25GB (single layer) 50GB (dual layer)	15GB (single layer) 30GB (dual layer)
Console-ation	PlayStation 3	Xbox 360 (only movies)
Backwards-compatibility?	Yes	Yes
First players	Samsung BD-P1000. Plays Blu-ray discs in true high-def; upscales standard DVDs; 1080p output via HDMI. <i>But</i> bloody expensive and slow loading times	Toshiba HD-A1. Plays HD DVD discs in true high-def; upscales standard DVDs; half the price of Blu-ray players. <i>But</i> it's more operationally awkward
Advantages	More capacity. More powerful support from computer and electronics firms	Initial players are cheaper. First to market
Disadvantages	Right now, so expensive a mortgage is required	40% less storage capacity
Fan club	EA, Vivendi Universal, 20th Century Fox, Disney, MGM	Microsoft, New Line Cinema, Paramount, Universal, Warner Bros

"We're very interested in the ability to fit more data on a disc and have that data install three times faster"

Shayne Herrera, art director, Cryptic Studios

comes down to which medium allows for easiest development. PC vs Mac, VHS vs Betamax – the winner is always the format which allows others to utilise the technology with the fewest barriers."

Forecasting a winner at this stage isn't easy, but as they say in *Highlander*, there can be only one. **PCZ**



Is there anything you want Pavel Barter to investigate? (Warning: some jobs might be considered too big or too small...)

@ letters@pczone.co.uk

✉ pavel barter, pc zone,
2 balcombe st, london, nw1 6nw

WHOSE LINE IS IT ANYWAY?

Or, the great big game quote quiz! With your host, *Will Porter!*

HOW GENERAL IS your knowledge? Does it cover nuggets of witty dialogue from your favourite PC games? If so, then rejoice! At *PC ZONE*, we've decided to cater for your obsession with a one-off quiz dedicated to the more memorable sections of the .wav files that were once embedded deep on your hard-drive. Enjoy...

ON THE AIR

GENERAL QUOTAGE

1 "There's a book on the shelf over there. If I had even the slightest inclination to strain myself, I could probably relatively easily lean over and grab it. But I'm sure I can turn it into a meaningless puzzle of some sort."

2 "I never asked to be squad leader, but I had no choice. Now I've got 13 soldiers under my command. Thirteen men depending on me to make the right decisions and not get them killed. Thirteen families relying on me to bring their husbands and sons home. Thirteen. Thirteen is not a lucky number."

3 "I'll just ask the first Sand Creature I run into: 'Could you direct me to the baths, please?' 'Well, thank you.' 'Don't mention it, I used to be a bath attendant back when I was alive'..."

4 "The world is full of stories, and from time to time they permit themselves to be told."

5 "You've proved yourself a decisive man so I don't expect you'll have any trouble deciding what to do. If you're interested, just step into the portal and I will take that as a yes. Otherwise, well, I can offer you a battle you have no chance of winning... Rather anticlimactic after what you've just survived. Time to choose..."

6 "I can go no further. You alone must stand against the Prince of Destruction and his Mortal Servants. He must not have the Amulet of Kings!"

7 "My glory is expanding - filling the arteries of this vessel. I am in control. I am... No, it is hopeless. The cancer has spread throughout the Von Braun. They fill every available crack and crevice. They overwhelm. There is no other option..."

8 "The things that I want. A smoke. A whiskey. For the sun to shine. I want to sleep, to forget. To change the past. My wife and baby girl back. Unlimited ammo and a licence to kill. But right then, more than anything, I wanted her."

9 "Previously, certain protein chains important to the process of embryonic development were selectively prevented from forming. This is no longer the case. For those so inclined, now would be an excellent time for procreation. Which is to say, in layman's terms, you should give serious consideration to doing your part for the revival of the species."

10 "Oh, no! My roots lie not in any earthly nation's soil. I am an elemental spirit summoned up from the land of the dead itself and given one purpose. One skill. One desire: to drive! Or, to change oil or adjust timing belts if no driving jobs are open."

SNATCHES OF DIALOGUE

11 **Hero:** [having grabbed a guard by the neck] "Bad news."

Guard: "Argh! I knew it! I knew there were ninjas around here!"

Hero: "What?"

Guard: "Yeah, you've gotta be a ninja. How else could you sneak up and grab me like that?"

Hero: "Listen, I don't know what..."

Guard: "Wow! A real, live, ninja! I can't believe it!"

Hero: "Listen, I'm going to kill you if..."

Guard: "Wow! Killed by a ninja... Cool!"

12 Soldier: "But comrade Commissaar, why are we using potatoes instead of real grenades?"

High-ranking soldier: "Because real grenades are a lot worthy. Actually, they're a lot worthier than you!"

Soldier: "Oh, OK... My mistake."

13 Robot: "Statement: Ready to serve, master."

Hero: "You don't need to call me master, you know."

Robot: "Query: Don't I? I was under the assumption that organic meatbags such as yourself enjoyed such forms of address."

Hero: "Organic meatbags?"

Robot: "Retraction: Did I say that out loud? I apologise, master. While you are a meatbag, I suppose I should not call you as such."

Hero: "You just called me a meatbag again!"

Robot: "Explanation: It's just that... You have all these squishy parts, master. And all that water! How the constant sloshing doesn't drive you mad, I have no idea..."

Hero: "Neither do I, come to think of it..."

Robot: "Statement: Now do you understand the travails of my existence, master? Surely it does not compare to your existence, but still..."

Hero: "I survive. Somehow."

Robot: "Commentary: As do I. It is our lot in life, I suppose, master. Shall we find something to kill to cheer ourselves up?"

14 Female character: "Are you sure you pressed the right button?"

Male character: "I do not make mistakes of that kind."

Female: "Your hand might have slipped."

Male: "No. I wanted orange. It gave me lemon-lime."

Female: "The machine would not make a mistake..."

Male: "It's the maintenance man. He knows I like orange."

Female: "So you think the staff has some kind of plot..."

Male: "Yes. They do it on purpose!"

15 Caller: "These kids don't respect veterans, we fought for your freedom! When I came back from the Australian-American War, I didn't get a hero's welcome... I didn't get a pat on the back from my friends and neighbours saying, 'Thanks for fighting for our freedom James!' After years of fighting in the trenches, I come back here and everyone's watching TV!"

Radio Host: "Now, can you tell me what this Australian-American war was... I never really heard of it."

Caller: "God, not another one! Have you read a history book lately, son? The Australian-American war was the biggest war since the big one! I tell ya, I didn't do two tours and take boomerang shrapnel in my head to come back here and have a bunch of hippies deny our history!"

SNAPPY ONE LINERS

16 "War. War never changes."

17 "Why do we all have to wear these ridiculous ties?"

18 "You look like you need a monkey!"

19 "What cat?"

20 "Although over time, my husband will desire me less, sexually, he will always enjoy my pies."

21 "That was left-handed!"

22 "Come! We must press on against the tide of naughtiness. Mind your step."

23 "As in 'take the M5 to the A30' Cornwall?"

24 "You like them apples?"

25 "Damn! Those alien bastards are gonna pay for shooting up my ride!"

ANSWERS!

1. Sam (Sam & Max Hit The Road) 2. Sgt Matt Baker (Brothers In Arms: The Road To Hill 30) 3. The Prince (Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time) 4. Tommy's grandfather (Prey) 5. The G-Man (Half-Life) 6. Emperor Uriel Septim VII (The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion) 7. Shodan (System Shock 2) 8. Max Payne (Max Payne 2: The Fall Of Max Payne) 9. Dr Isaac Kleiner (Half-Life 2: Episode One) 10. Ciotis (Grim Fandango) 11. Sam Fisher and unlucky guard (Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory) 12. Russian soldiers and superior (Call Of Duty 2) 13. Player and HK47 (Knights Of The Old Republic) 14. Gunther Hermann and Anna Navarre (Deus Ex) 15. Lazlow and radio-caller (Grand Theft Auto III) 16. Narrator (Fallout) 17. Random scientist (Half-Life) 18. Moroccan street vendor (No One Lives Forever) 19. Alyx Vance (Half-Life 2) 20. Shifty G-Man dressed as a housewife (Psychonauts) 21. The Commando (Command & Conquer) 22. Minsc (Baldur's Gate II: Shadow Of Amn) 23. Lara Croft (Tomb Raider: Legend) 24. Every single mercenary on the island (Far Cry) 25. Duke Nukem (Duke Nukem 3D)

SO HOW DID YOU DO?

Sorry, we appear to have gone all *Cosmo* on you...

1-5: I'm not even going to dignify you with a response. Let alone help you when you need to wipe your own arse.

6-10: You're clearly a mite simple. Perhaps wearing special glasses would help. Nevertheless, well done for trying.

11-15: Well, you're not completely thick. An uneventful life of listless mediocrity is nothing to be ashamed of you know.

16-20: Nearly there. But that sums it all up really doesn't it? Never quite getting to what really matters? Why don't you just end it all?

21-25: Here we are with such a short span of time on planet Earth, and you've filled your life with meaningless game quotations. You make us sick, you pathetic waster.

PREPARE FOR ANNIHILATION...

SUPREME COMMANDER

Andy Robinson has yet more embarrassing problems with his giant mechanical rocket-spider...

DEVELOPER Gas Powered Games PUBLISHER THQ WEBSITE www.supremecommander.com PREVIOUSLY IN... 166

THE LOWDOWN

Gigantic RTS battles on a scale never before seen



Intuitive interface that encourages strategic gameplay



Each faction boasts a unique look and weapons



Huge experimental units that truly terrify



Visuals could do with a little more polish



ETA
**FEB
2007**

I'M BEING GIVEN a tour of Gas Powered Games' plush Redmond offices. "And this is the server room," announces an energetic Chris Taylor, a man who seems to eat, breathe and guzzle gaming alongside his morning Weetabix. "There's over 10 terabytes of storage and three cooling systems so the room stays icy cold," he says. "It's where we keep the beer."

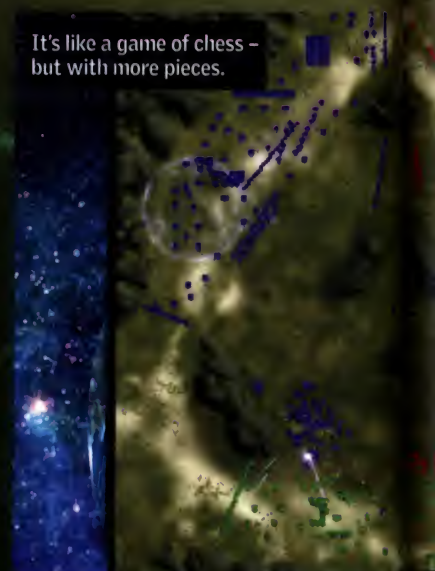
A tour from Chris Taylor is never dull; the legendary creator of *Total Annihilation* is rarely short of enthusiasm, managing to make every corporate meeting room and square cubicle a joy to explore. Veering past walls and walls of gorgeous concept art, I can tell that Gas Powered Games is a studio striving for evolution, and I can't wait to get down to business and find out what its latest innovative and exciting RTS effort, *Supreme Commander* is like to play.

Thankfully, I don't have long to wait, as very shortly I find myself in a large, finely-catered gaming room filled with ninja-grade

PCs and widescreen monitors that could be used alongside the main stage at Glastonbury. On the screen in front of me, an overexcited Chris Taylor is giving a demonstration of what you should expect from his most epic RTS to date, and already there are enough planes, tanks and explosions on-screen that I'm considering nipping off to one of the office's 'collaborative spaces' for a quick breather.

"Most RTS games are played like a sandbox, where you stick your face into the top of that sandbox and slide around trying to stay on top of things," says Taylor, targeting a pair of nuclear missiles onto a raging battlefield. "Well now we've got this extended volume, so there's fighter planes at one altitude, bombers at another, torpedo bombers coming down, missiles flying up..." Right on cue, his nukes strike home, effortlessly taking out hundreds of

It's like a game of chess – but with more pieces.



tanks and infantry in a searing visual spectacle. "So we're really getting into what happens above the battlefield in a most serious way."

CONTROL FREAK

To say the display in front of me is intense would be an understatement to say the least. But I can't help but wonder how anything less than a team of men fitted with Doc Ock mechanical limbs could control the multiple, massive assault forces Taylor is touting in his demo. Without a top-notch interface, *Supreme Commander* looks like it could quickly descend into multi-management hell.

Thankfully, my fears are put to rest when Taylor steps aside and I take the reigns for myself, as Gas Powered Games have constructed a highly intuitive interface that keeps the game's epic battles chugging along smoothly. It takes a game or two for me to get comfortable, but the zoomed-out 'strategic' view eventually becomes





Ah, the romance of life at sea...

It's about strategy rather than tactics, the ultimate objective being to take out your enemy's command unit



You'll spend a lot of time in 'far-out-o-vision'.



The robot navy fears nothing. Except rust.

Airborne unit-dispensers will be in real-life military scenarios by 2009...



second nature, and I'm soon poring over its all-encompassing chess-like display for a more strategic look at the battlefield.

Another impressive aspect is the automated nature of base management, which allows you to shift your focus over to the front lines rather than worrying about tedious construction. After a short period of early-game tweaking, I can pretty much leave my factories and defence units to look after themselves. Build orders can be queued before the factories are even built, and waypoints can be issued even as units are rolling out along the conveyor belt.

But *Supreme Commander* is by no means a build-and-rush experience. As Taylor reminds me, the game is about strategy rather than tactics, the ultimate objective being to take out

your enemy's commander – or ACU (Armoured Command Unit) – rather than amassing and deploying wholly-expendable armies. This is where the game's innovative zoomed-out 'strategic' view really makes its mark. Having an instantly accessible, global view of the battlefield is incredibly useful in strategic planning, allowing you to find gaps in your enemy's defence, create decoy assaults and flank the enemy commander to snatch victory. It's an experience more like *Risk* than any other RTS game I've played.

UP YOUR GAME

As the day progresses, excitement fills the room of war-gripped journalists as we get a chance for a spot of willy-waving, as the first ever *Supreme Commander*



Aeon buildings under construction have a fancy 'water-morphing' look to them.



Clash of the titans

Units so big you might need a few extra TFTs to see them



Past the vanilla tech levels, you'll eventually discover the titanic beauties nestled in the 'experimental' build tab – units so big and menacing that in many cases, you'll actually have to zoom the camera out to get a proper look at their 300ft cannons.

Rarely have you seen anything quite as intimidating as the creations in the *Supreme Commander* catalogue. Take the so-called Aeon Galactic Colossus. Towering over your puny tanks and infantry, shooting lasers from its eyes and sucking up artillery with its gravity claws, it's definitely not a creature you'd invite inside if it followed you home from school.

But not all experimental units are frontline mecha-godzillas. The UEF mobile factory, for example, acts as more of a support unit, pumping out a constant stream of tanks to aid your main assault force while also servicing aircraft and blasting attackers with its on-board artillery turrets. In this case, it's both big and clever – a theme that runs throughout the game.

tournament is announced, with prizes and all. I'm quick to enrol as PCZ_EssexHoodlum, enticed by the *Supreme Commander* flask and goodies, and mildly confident after a convincing training victory against an inexperienced German staff writer.

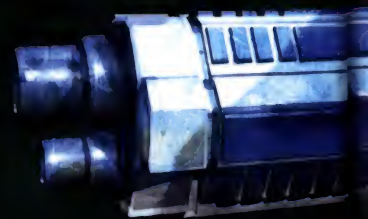
My first game – a 4v4 match on a wintery map writhing with resources – goes well. After the first two commanders are reduced to black scorch marks on the battlefield, the fight is on for first place – at which point I get my first taste of *Supreme Commander*'s massive experimental units.

Out of nowhere, my opponent sends a gigantic flying saucer spinning in my direction – one of the most intimidating RTS units I've ever seen. Alerting the rest of the room with my knee-jerk yell of "Holy shit!" I zoom out to the strategic view and order every aircraft at my disposal to attack the screen-wide mammoth that's hovering menacingly towards my base.

Thankfully, it soon succumbs to my might during an impressive air skirmish

that has half of the room yelping in awe. Collapsing theatrically to earth like a scene from *Independence Day*, the ship leaves a scorched and smoking shell in the ground; the whole scene suggesting that *Supreme Commander* will be as entertaining to watch as it is to play.

After my dramatic win in the first game, I'm feeling a bit cocky as I waltz into the final. Victory is but a whiff away. Sizing up my foreign opponents, I decide my chances are good, and the group of spectators behind me further inflate my cranium. It's my most focused and efficient performance yet; I quickly claim the nearest resources, my factories systematically upgrade tech levels and pump out small attack forces



THE STORY SO FAR...

GAS POWERED GAMES

SUPREME COMMANDER

COOKING WITH GAS

Chris Taylor sets up GPG and teams up with Microsoft for the studio's first game.



SIEGE FORTS

Dungeon Siege arrives to solid reviews but RPG purists moan about its simplicity.



SECOND SIEGE

A Dungeon Siege sequel rolls along, with a deeper story but similar gameplay.

COMMAND DECISION

Chris Taylor gets back to his RTS roots with the epic Supreme Commander.

1998

2002

2005

2007

Tech me up

Scale the engineering tech tree for the most lethal planes, warships and tanks



At tech level 1, you're limited to building small, disposable units like the Cyrbran Light Assault Bot and UEF Attack bomber.



Things get more interesting at tech 2 when hard-hitting destroyer ships, naval-blasting torpedo-bombers and mobile artillery sneak into the mix.



At tech 3 the gloves are off. Stompy siege bots, nuke-launching subs and air-superiority fighters are all reasons to get your engineers upgrading.



Tech 3 engineers can build massive experimental units - towering machines of death that can literally crush smaller foes underfoot. Woo!

It's like *Total Annihilation* never went away.



Is it really worth fighting over all this sand?



But of course! Robot armies need silicon!



The good ship Lollypop it ain't...

with ruthless efficiency. My navy controls the waves, my bombers and fighter jets fill the sky and my ground forces are growing to the hundreds with tech level 3 siege bots leading the charge. The final assault on my opponent is nearly ready and the crown of my army almost complete: a gigantic mechanical spider carrying a 100ft cannon that can level bases single-handed.

I'm rubbing my hands with glee. It's almost finished: 96%, 97%! Eight engineer bots and even my Supreme Commander himself are working

together to bring it to life. Then 98%, 99%! It's done! Jets, destroyers, land troops: go, go, go! My titanic spiderbot jolts into action. Then suddenly, at the heart of my offensive strike force a nuclear blast breaks loose. I'm confronted with fire, smoke, explosions and the eerie message: "You have been defeated." Gasps turn to disbelief, disbelief to laughter. I'm frozen in shock, and then it suddenly dawns on me; my spiderbot goliath has stepped on my Supreme Commander.

Chris Taylor shakes his head in puzzlement and turns to a member of his development team: "That's a bug! Write that down!" **PCZ**



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YOU'RE TRYING TO MARRY YOUR YOUNG PRINCESS TO YOUR



AND YOU NEED TO STRENGTHEN YOUR DEFENCES TO PROTECT

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NOVEMBER 2006



www.totalwar.com

**HOT
SHOT**

COMMAND & CONQUER 3: TIBERIUM WARS

DEVELOPER EA LA PUBLISHER EA WEBSITE www.commandandconquer.com ETA 2007


BYOND THE GOLDEN mammoth tanks and hovering Orcas, here's your first chance to have a gander at *C&C3*, replete with the Brotherhood of Nod and the stealthy war machine they're using to take the fight to the GDI. The nostalgic cues are all there: giant, hand-shaped training camps, laser-blasting obelisks and sneaky stealth tanks blowing up power plants and then speeding off to who-knows-where. And of course, the dictator that it's OK to love. Yes, Kane's back, and what's more he's looking just as menacing and well-groomed as we remember him in FMV sequences that are so nostalgic, we think we need to sit down for a breather. Plus, the computer voice is still oddly arousing too...

SUPER TROOPER

C&C3 is set to feature a multitude of unit upgrades, including personal jump-jets so that soldiers can leap over units and structures. GDI soldiers have an even more significant trick up their sleeves; at any time, infantry can call in transports to ferry them around the map, making the side an incredibly responsive and flexible force.

KANE'S NEW TOYS

No longer hidden under a blanket of secrecy, Kane's Brotherhood of Nod are looking even nastier in the third *C&C* instalment, with old favourites like the flame and stealth tanks rejoining the unit roster, and new additions the stealthed Vertigo Bombers and hulking Avatar Mech strengthening the Brotherhood's evil cause.



BRING THE HOUSE DOWN

Fancy graphics technology means you can literally blow chunks off of tanks and bring down buildings piece by piece. Across the 30 single-player missions in the game, you get to visit over 11 different theatres of war, including Australia, North Africa and even London, which you'll be glad to hear is inside a tiberium-free Blue Zone.

SMART SOLDIER

The days of thick-headed RTS soldiers are over; *C&C3* sports freshly-updated unit AI which has your ranks taking cover behind buildings and generally using the environment intelligently. Will *The Battle For Middle-Earth's* unit-emotion system crop up? "We'll do it if it feels right," says *C&C* exec producer Mike Verdu.

A BIT FAMILIAR

EA are doing their best to invoke the look and feel of the original *C&C*; a female voice makes familiar announcements ('Low power!'), while a persistent ticking signals the arrival of cold, hard, tiberium cash. Classic music tracks are also being swiped from *Tiberian Sun*, and the sidebar makes a triumphant return too, now with a minimalist, hovering makeover.



Dear Will Porter,

I started up *Battlefield 2142* today after I'd let you have a go on my PC and something was very wrong – I couldn't seem to move the way I wanted to. Everything I attempted yielded a bizarre and confusing response on-screen. It turns out you'd inverted the y-axis of my mouse, and I was now shooting the floor while enemies flew overhead. My fellow futuristic soldiers were looking at me like I had a debilitating mental disorder. What the hell is wrong with you?

Steve Hogarty

Dear Steve,

It was at quite an early age that I realised that I was a bit different from other people. It just so happens that I like my mouse to go the other way, almost as if I were flying a plane or tilting my own head back. If this threatens you, then I'm sorry – but you're just going to have to live with what you perceive as 'alien' and 'perverse'. I'm inverted, and I'm bloody proud of it.

Will Porter

Dear Will,

Freak! FREAK! Everybody knows that if you want to look up, you push the mouse upwards. Gordon Freeman is not a plane, so why are you trying to fly him? All that, and you've got the nerve to come sit on my PC, change my mouse controls and touch my mouse with your horrible uncoordinated fingers, without changing it back. It's the nerdy equivalent of leaving the toilet seat up.

SH

Dear Steve,

So I'm in trouble for getting onto your precious computer and changing one measly little option in the game menu? It's not like I've slapped it down to 800x600 or turned the blood option off is it? I'm just made differently to other boys, that's all. Besides, I'm not alone Steve. There are thousands of us. And we're living on the same streets as you. And we're uniting. And you won't know who any of us are – not right up until that very, very last moment... And then the army of the inverted will cover the Earth.

WP

Dear Will,

Your numbers will be decimated the first time you come across something slightly above or below you. Face it: your kind isn't welcome in a world where up means up.

SH

Dear Steve,

You're going to be the first one down against the wall, buddy.

WP

GOOD TO GLOW

STALKER: Shadow Of Chernobyl lives! All the latest on the much-delayed radioactive shooter

stalker-game.com | ETA: Q1 2007

UNLIKE MOST of the vegetation and wildlife around the Chernobyl site of the world's worst nuclear accident, *STALKER* is very much alive. The good news is that the extra development time seems to have improved what was becoming a bit of a gaming wasteland.

STALKER: Shadow Of Chernobyl is set in a radioactive 30sq km area shut off by the military after strange environmental anomalies and bizarre creatures started popping up. As a Stalker – a hunter of bizarre artefacts that have been spewed out from another dimension – you have to compete with the military, other Stalkers and freakish mutants to complete quests and ultimately discover what the frack is going on.

A newly-added scripted central storyline means that there's now a solid 30 hours of main gameplay, with double that available if you still decide to go off and wander. What was once entirely AI-driven is now peppered with nuggets of scripted action, albeit subject to the whims of NPC intelligence – fully AI-driven fire-fights, for example, where the outcome between a gang of Stalkers and the soldiers is completely unpredictable. *STALKER* gives you the

freedom to adopt whatever strategy you want to – whether that's storming in like Dubya, hanging back while the grunts take the heavy fire, or sneaking up on the rooftops to drop ragdoll enemies from above.

You can also use your *Doom 3*-style PDA to access maps, missions and a familiar RPG grid inventory to change weapons, put on bandages to stop bleeding, use health packs, drink vodka to cure radiation sickness (true) or add silencers and other gear. The day/night cycle is important because you can be seen more easily during the day, but attempting missions at night is dangerous – even though the Stalkers and military are at rest, building campfires and having campfire sing-alongs (again, true) – as the mutants come out to attack. Some of the mutants below-ground can go invisible now, which isn't our favourite enemy trait ever – but they still have dripping tentacles coming out of their mouths, so all is not lost.

However, with dynamic lighting, full physics, meaty weaponry, a bizarre sci-fi setting and plans for 32-player deathmatches, *STALKER* could yet turn out to be a truly original, quirky shooter, fusing elements from titles such as *Deus Ex* and *Boiling Point: Road To Hell*. Full playtest soon.



IN THE SPOTLIGHT:

The man who knows footy better than Motty

PETE SOTTREL - CO-HEAD RESEARCHER ON FOOTBALL MANAGER 2007



It's Pete Sottrel's role to ensure that every iteration of *Football Manager* is as accurate and wholesome as the last, filtering the expert knowledge of football fans from all over the shop into the wondrous cage of beautiful gaming that Sports Interactive have created. He's overseer of everything from the cavorting of Ashley Cole and friends to the lowly Conferences...

From the top of the tree to fan contributions, how many researchers are there working on the new rendition of *Football Manager*?

"There's an assistant researcher for every club in the divisions that I look after, so that makes 116, then there are about 50 working on lower-level English teams. I'm not sure of the arrangements of every country concerning assistant researchers, but I would estimate around 1,500 in total."

How do you head-hunt people who'll provide statistics on their chosen side?

"We look on our messageboards first. We need folk who've shown that they have a mature outlook and have sensible opinions regarding the data concerning their club. Our next port of call for new recruits, should our initial hunting ground prove fruitless, is the messageboard for the club in question; we'll post a request for anyone interested to email us, and then take it from there. We try to keep the team together as much as possible; a solid and experienced team is important to us. As there are so many

aspects to take into consideration when researching a club and its players, new researchers often need a lot of guidance in getting the research to the standard that we require. We find that by looking after people properly in this way, by taking the time to point out errors, omissions, over-rating etc, then folk soon get into the swing of things, and will only want to leave if and when other commitments in their lives (eg paid work, families) mean that they can no longer put in the kind of effort and commitment that comes with helping us with the research. Approximately one quarter of the 116 assistant researchers who work directly with me have been here since I started at SI, towards the end of 1999."

How do you make sure that they're not at all biased by their own fandom?

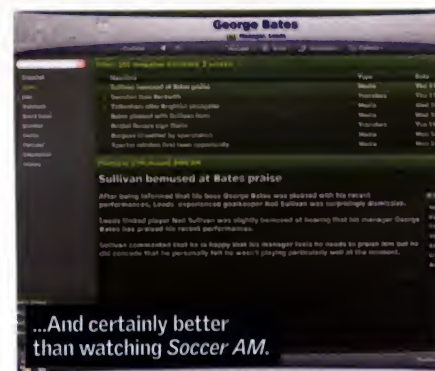
"We have research guidelines that show the kind of ratings that we would expect for players at clubs playing at specific levels. Of course, there's room for manoeuvre outside these guidelines, but to do so the assistant researcher has to convince us of their case."

How detailed do the stats contributions get? Do any of the researchers get a little carried away?

"The detail is limited by the amount of fields needing completion for each club/player. Currently a player profile can have over 100 fields completed, and that's not including detail about their favourite colleagues/clubs, playing history, current loans, injury history, languages spoken and contract clauses. So, really, it looks as though we positively encourage our assistant researchers to get carried away! A fair few of them use their position within our research team to give them the excuse that they crave to go and watch the reserves and youth teams of their club, armed with trusty notebook and pencil."

At what point are the player rosters in *FM2007* finalised? Is it as the Premiership transfer window closes?

"The day before the Gold Master is delivered to SEGA. Even after the closing of the August transfer windows, loan deals and transfers of unattached players to clubs still take place, so we need to continue to monitor events in the football world."



tat Zone

They thought it was a goner, but the tat came back. It just wouldn't stay away...

Deep in the shifting sands beneath PCZ towers, a team of Future's finest have been digging for what's been going-on for a decade. Then, a year ago, they struck tat. Sticking out of a muddy roof tunnel were XL gaming T-shirts, caps, lighters and humorous dolls. From that point on, our bountiful masters have encouraged us to sell the contents of this wondrous tat-seam on eBay, under the tag of PCZoners every month from the day our issue goes on sale. There's tat in them there hills.

Buy our tat at www.ebay.co.uk
All proceeds go to charity. Honest.
www.entertainmentsoftwarecharity.org



THIS MONTH'S TAT



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	DEFCON NUCLEAR SURVIVAL GUIDE Hooray for nuclear armageddon! And its stylish promotional pamphlets!	£7.89	12
	COMBINE BASEBALL SHIRT The Valve Baseball team's shirt is so nerdy that it actually goes through the entire nerd-spectrum and comes out the other end as really rather stylish.	£26.00	7

PCZONE
CHARTS

ChartTrack

- 1 — **THE SIMS 2**
Issue 147 82%
- 2 ↑ **THE SIMS 2: OPEN FOR BUSINESS**
Issue 166 72%
- 3 ↓ **LOTR: THE BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH II**
Issue 167 71%
- 4 ↑ **WORLD OF WARCRAFT**
Issue 152 95%
- 5 ↑ **FOOTBALL MANAGER 2006**
Issue 162 90%
- 6 RE **STAR WARS: EMPIRE AT WAR**
Issue 166 85%
- 7 ↑ **THE SIMS 2: NIGHTLIFE**
Issue 161 58%
- 8 ↑ **THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION**
Issue 168 95%
- 9 ↓ **CIVILIZATION IV**
Issue 162 92%
- 10 RE **ROME: TOTAL WAR - GOLD EDITION**
Issue 148 93%
- 11 ↑ **THE SIMS 2: UNIVERSITY**
Issue 153 57%
- 12 ↑ **HALF-LIFE 2: EPISODE ONE**
Issue 170 91%
- 13 RE **AGE OF EMPIRES III**
Issue 162 84%
- 14 ↓ **PREY**
Issue 171 86%
- 15 ↓ **CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 2006**
Issue 167 69%
- 16 ↓ **CIVILIZATION IV: WARLORDS**
Issue 172 79%
- 17 NEW **LEGO STAR WARS II: THE ORIGINAL TRILOGY**
Issue 173 80%
- 18 RE **THE COMPLETE COLLECTION OF THE SIMS**
Issue 165 N/A
- 19 ↓ **COMMAND & CONQUER: THE FIRST DECADE**
Issue 167 N/A
- 20 ↓ **MS FLIGHT SIM 2004: A CENTURY OF FLIGHT**
Issue 133 89%

1 **THE SIMS 2**

A *Sims 2* haiku:
Little people play / In backyards
and living rooms / How soon till
they die?

7 **THE SIMS 2: NIGHTLIFE**

A *Sims 2: Nightlife* haiku:
Frolics and night dance / Ships
sail on a cold ocean / Wear a
pretty dress.

2 **THE SIMS 2:
OPEN FOR BUSINESS**

A *Sims 2: OFB* haiku: Hark at their
shop fun! The dance of wholesale
retail / The boss winks slowly.

11 **THE SIMS 2: UNIVERSITY**

A *Sims 2: University* haiku:
Bollocky piss arse / Shitty
shitty mango tree / Stop buying
Sims soon.

WANNA RACE?

RACE: not to be confused with the well-known breakdown service.....

www.race-game.org | ETA: November

THE CHANCES ARE that if you like nothing better than laying down some rubber on your PC (and no, we're not talking about fetishists here), you should be pretty familiar with Simbin, the team behind *GTR 1 & 2* and *GT Legends*.

However, there's been a recent shake-up at the Swedish developers as a substantial proportion of the team have departed with Ian Bell at the helm to set up Blimey! Games in London. But with the dust still settling and *GTR2* barely out of the door, the team at Simbin are already well into the production cycle of their new project, the rather imaginatively-titled *RACE*.

Based on the WTCC (that's World Touring Car Championships to the uninitiated), instead of the supercar-monsters that featured in *GTR*, you'll now have the opportunity to take the wheel of a collection of beefed-up road cars. Most are now front-wheel drive, taking the game in a completely different direction to its slide-happy brethren. What's more, with the driving being played out over two, much

shorter races, with far more contact, the racing's bound to be exciting.

As well as some of the tracks featured in its siblings, there are also some intriguing new additions, such as Brands Hatch and Macau, with the latter being a street-based circuit in a similar fashion to Monaco that promises to offer an exhilarating drive.

Simbin also promise a host of improvements such as ramped up car models, AI opponents in multiplayer and our personal favourite, the new 'dirty windscreen' effect; as you progress round the track, bugs and small bits of rubber will accumulate on your windscreen – but you'll now be able to remove it with the aid of the new working windscreen wipers. Which should at least save you from having to hand over some cash to a stranger at the traffic lights.



www.pegi.info

He's not alone in this – it's one of the reasons why DICE members can often be found online playing their games within the Battlefield community. Want to get their respect? Try aiming for the new Supreme Commander rank which highlights one player as the best in the world. Visit www.battlefield.ea.com to find out if you have a shot at the title.

Kill or be killed. The latest Battlefield game takes the intensity and addictive quality of its predecessors and adds the first new game mode for the series: Titan. Hovering high above the battlefield under the control of a commander and relentlessly shelling the ground below, these vast warships will need taking down through organised, tactical teamwork; disable the Titan's shields through continuous ground-based missile attacks while fighting off enemy troops, then hitch a ride and blow up the core.

ENTER THE TITAN

Whether you're supported by friends, clan members or newly-met teammates, the close quarter combat on the Titan will test your Battlefield skills – gather your squad, hide your spawn beacon, protect your medic and pray you don't run out of bullets. "The fierce, intensive fighting on board the Titan is something brand new – 32 players fighting in those corridors is just so awesome," exudes Senior Producer Marcus, who is buzzing from the first of the studio's two daily playtests. Only by playing and replaying does the development team achieve Battlefield's signature and unrivalled game balance, ensuring that regardless of how you equip yourself for conflict, you are never without a chance. That's why no one does war like DICE.

"We wanted people to feel like they're in the future without alienating them from the game," says Producer Jamil, explaining the fundamental decision to keep recognisable vehicles and ballistic weapons. It's a choice the team made after watching every sci-fi movie available – Battlefield 2142™ was originally space bound before DICE concluded an Earth setting would still deliver the best experience. "Our focus in almost everything we do is, 'Gameplay comes first'," Jamil reaffirms.

FUTURE WAR TOYS

So the core, award-winning Battlefield experience is retained, but it doesn't mean you don't get your hands on ultramodern warfare – expect smart mines that home in on vehicles, hovering gun drones to cover your back, and a tried-and-tested assortment of weapons updated for next century fighting. And then there are the new combat vehicles... Let's just say no one is likely to forget their first encounter with an eight-metre high Battle Walker.



THE PROFESSIONALS

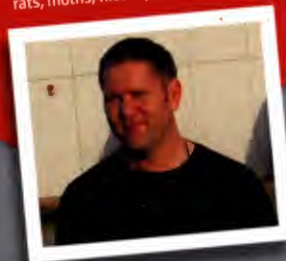
Uncovering the lies and slander perpetuated by PC gaming

IN PC ZONE'S MANY battles with household pests (Will's battle with cockroaches that he's no longer allowed to speak about because it suggests that he lives in a dirty house, which he doesn't, and Steve's struggle with mouse-kind), we came to wondering just how well our favourite PC games

fared in terms of their representation of bugs, rats and other suppliers of noxious household taint. Step forward then, Mike Tomlinson – heir apparent to the throne of little beastie slaughter. Let the spraying of chemicals and laying down of sticky traps commence...

**THIS MONTH:
VERMIN**

Expert: Mike Tomlinson Job: Environmental Services Consultant Expert pedantry: Bugs, rats, moths, flies – you name it.



EVERQUEST II RATS

"I like the look of these little fellows: a nice social group, they appear to be in proportion to the brown rat. They look a little fat, but they're actually like urban rats,

fed on discarded burgers and pizzas – they're overweight and probably have high cholesterol as a result. There seems to be a lack of sharp front teeth without which they may have to resort to sucking the fingers off your hands. There's also a nice thickness to the tails, but they're missing the ribbed pattern. They should be able to run, jump and climb faster than you can blink an eye, but with their weight problem, they'd probably just waddle."

PCZONE

★★★★★

Original, and nearly best



DOOM 3 TRITES

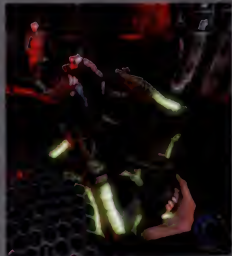
"Spiders wrap their victim in a web or bite with a venom, resulting in paralysis. They then regurgitate stomach fluids over the victim and use mandibles to break down the tissue into soup.

Once externally digested, they suck up the soup, leaving the hard parts behind. These look OK – a bit follically-challenged and they'd have a hard time getting a good bite out of you with their human teeth. They're solitary creatures until the mating season, when males goes on the pull. Maybe that's why there are so many of them together."

PCZONE

★★★★★

Randy little buggers



PREY EXPLODING SPIDER GRENADE

"A spider-like creature that looks like he's had a dose of insecticide and is on his back, twitching his last. Or maybe he's doing some kind of mating dance. If he's lucky, the female will be receptive, though he may have to tie her down with a few silk threads (true). If not, he'll probably lose a limb or get eaten. The females tend to be more aggressive, so having disposable limbs is a bonus and exploding ones even better, giving him a chance to get away. If this one has three legs left instead of six, the odds are stacked against him."

PCZONE

★★★★★

Few legs to stand on



STARSHIP TROOPERS BUGS

"Oh, I love these insects: the agility of a spider, the armour of a beetle, the attitude of a wasp crossed with the work ethic of an ant. Even the colouring says, 'don't mess with me'. They look and act aggressively, especially when they swarm and come at you. Sadly, the joints are wrongly articulated and they'd have problems crossing soft ground, most likely sinking in like tent pegs. There's no insect to compare this to, but it has the mandibles to die for."

PCZONE

★★★★★

Almost fell in love...



FREWARE BEES IN SWARM RACER

"A bee swarm can contain 1,000 to 30,000 bees – it's an instinctive act and a way for the colony to reproduce when the nest becomes overcrowded. Swarms aren't dangerous as bees are only aggressive near the nest, and the swarm are attracted to a pheromone given off by the queen. Here you are, the queen controlling the swarm, with a feel of urgency and working together. They don't look aggressive, don't act aggressively and get on with their jobs. The retro graphics don't spoil it, they add to it. This is what being a bee is all about."

PCZONE

★★★★★

Free, but clever

WINNER: SWARM RACER

The first entirely free game to win the coveted The Professionals award for astute cleverness. *Swarm Racer* – as featured in our Freeware section (p135) – has stung a special place in our anally-retentive hearts.

ARE YOU A PROFESSIONAL?

PC ZONE is in search of readers with professional knowledge or anally-retentive knowledge in the following fields, and many more:

*Elevators *Portable Light Sources *Crates *Locksmithery
*Burglary *Nazi uniforms *Dogs *Monkeys *Vending Machines

If you want to cast your eye over these or any other PC gaming areas, then email us at TheProfessionals@pczone.co.uk and stick your oar in as far as it'll go.



"Do you want him medium or well done?"



He'll be cool, even when controlled by a 14-year-old from Iowa.

ALL TOO REAL...

Unreal deity and king of UT Jeff Morris pours goodness upon one and all

www.ut2007.com | ETA: 2007

IN A MAGAZINE that's flush with material on *BF2142*, it's perhaps time to dwell on one of the sci-fi multiplayer blasts that it's pipped to the release-post. Enter stage left the shaggy-haired and always hyper-enthusiastic Jeff Morris – who's just abuzzing about something that clearly delineates his oeuvre and EA's Norwegian offering.

"Something that's always bugged us in vehicle-based games is that they'll often have three different teams, but they're all full of the same kind of kind vehicles," says Morris. "You'd say, 'well that tank is maybe a little more armoured, this tank does a little more damage' – but they're all just basically a tank. What we wanted to do was to make our two teams, the Axon and the Necris, radically different."

And this is perhaps why the Axon team are gifted with the wonderful Goliath tank, but the spidery looks of the Necris have granted them an entirely different kettle of sci-fi fish – the Necris walker. "It's a walker vehicle so it's much taller," explains Morris as the spindly legs on the screen in front of him start to move. "This actually makes it a little more vulnerable – but we've added a

crouch functionality which allows you to sneak up on people a little more". As with tanks, the turn speed on a walker is painfully slow, but its cutting-beam weapon is stunning – with a supremely powerful timed blast of laser that you can leave scorch marks in the earth like piss in the snow.

"Also, there's this great multiplayer game called *Joint Operations* that we're all very addicted to," continues the Epic man. "They have these cool dirt bikes – and we got to wondering about how to get a dirt-bike into *UT*. So we came up with the Necris Viper – it's got this great glide ability when you jump up. It also has this cool torpedo ability where you can jump up and bail out, then it turns into this flaming projectile that can go and destroy stuff."

With its hoverboards (complete with *Tony Hawks*-style tricks with which to taunt your enemy), the campaign-feel of its new Warfare mode (in which different victories and mission accomplishments take direct effects on the next map in rotation), and sheer graphical and physical loveliness of the whole affair, there are few more exciting games on the horizon. Although *Quake Wars* looks good too. Fight! Fight! Fight!

THE MAN WHO KNOWS



Space, formerly occupied largely by cold, desolate nothingness, has just got a **little less empty**. Indeed, Sir Patrick Moore's own monocle has been reported to have dropped from his puffy cheek as he muttered: "**My god. It's full of Romanians...**" As indeed space is – in exciting new game *Romanians In Space*! Said AAA title, developed in Romania, has however courted controversy in neighbouring Hungary – who are incandescent with rage at their nation's in-space portrayal. The storyline begins in 1988 with totalitarian fool and erstwhile Romanian president Ceausescu setting out to conquer the US, only for ten years later to be hailed as **Emperor of all Planet Earth**. Forty years later and intergalactic war is raging – with remnants of the defiant Hungarian nation forming a **separatist enclave** away from Romanian control. Hungarians who must be destroyed. Back on Earth, in the real world, and **international tension** has risen to **boiling point** – with **red-hot rage** over *Romanians In Space* being sprayed through Magyar news broadcasts and Internet forums. "The problem with this game is that it **makes people hate**," screamed one poster on the now defunct forums of developers 2bad Design. "If a Romanian kid plays this game, he sees **Hungarians are the enemy...**" Claims of it being a **work of fiction** from the developers have gone largely unheard, and while the game is now on Romanian shelves, there are reports of **heightened military activity** along the Hungarian border. Romanians, however, are not alone in space – there are **giraffes** there too. God of all, and king of Peruvian spit-beasts, Jeff Minter – the slightly eccentric creator of such retro classics as *Llamatron*, *Llamazap*, *Attack Of The Mutant Camels* and *Revenge Of The Mutant Camels* – is readying his latest classic for release on PC. The psychedelic, **potentially drug-enhanced**, *Space Giraffe* is on its way – complete with **otter spunk**. Otter spunk is just one example of the **foul language** that adorn all of Minter's released screenshots – a sign of his unwillingness for major games sites to cover his work. Other profanities used include '**Fluff F***er**', '**Horse Smegma**' and '**C***, C*****'. Proof that swearing may not be **big or clever**, but can be **funny**.

"Neighbours Hungary are incandescent with rage at their nation's in-space portrayal"



"Last to the tree and back's a dirty goose!"

COMING SOON...

WARHAMMER: MARK OF CHAOS

Jon Blyth dips an elbow into the epic, heroic, perpetual struggle

DEVELOPER Black Hole Entertainment PUBLISHER Namco Bandai WEBSITE www.markofchaos.com PREVIOUSLY IN... 171

THE LOWDOWN

Good, unfussy controls	✓
Battles as big as they should be	✓
All the races are there	✓
Good promise for multiplayer	✓
Great use of Warhammer fantasy universe	✓
Warhammer will rarely win you human affection	✗

ETA
NOV

MY VISIT TO Games Workshop HQ a few months back left me with a teenage thrill more persistent than I'd have liked. I daresay it's this thrill that's dogged my attempts to find a sensible world-shaping career, and finds me writing about videogames as a 32-year-old. But sitting here now, I can't say I'd feel happier without it. Richer, better-dressed, yes. More capable of handling myself in diplomatic situations, certainly. But happier? My defiant laugh fades to a thousand-yard stare.

The first moments of *Mark Of Chaos* brought back that surge. The movie that kicks it all off sets the tone. Earnest, relentless battle to the point of absurdity. Yes, it's an RTS, but putting my units on the table, I mean map, meticulously facing them the right way and getting ready to start the battle, I noticed with a clench that *Mark Of Chaos* feels much truer to its table-based roots than that notable *Warhammer 40K* strategy game, *Dawn Of War*. No resource management,

no base-building, and you can't top up your units during a scenario – you decide on your army before the battle begins, and guide them to death or victory and the next camp, where you can rebuild your troops before packing them off again without so much as a thank you.

ISN'T SHE LOVELY?

Developers Black Hole haven't been slaves to the tabletop formula, though – there's a semi-traditional RPG element with heroes, skill trees, inventories and dressing up. For an easy comparison, saying *Rome: Total War* will create a mental picture worth a couple of hundred words. The game looks lovely, with a satisfying zoom (useful for taking screenshots) and good, intuitive controls. With hundreds of troops on-screen at the later levels, we'll just wait to see how smoothly the old girl runs, and whether you'll need a troll of a PC to deal with the action.

As well as the human Empire and the Chaos hordes, you can play as the moon-

worshipping sub-subculture of cheese-addicted Skaven, or entertain the ambitions of the pompous, isolationist self-regarding High Elves. Well, we say isolationist; there's the traditional loose alliance between the the High Elves, then Humans and Dwarves, but you know it wouldn't last if there was nothing else to fight.

If you're breathlessly protesting the lack of orcs, dwarves, snotlings and the oft-neglected vampires in that list, don't worry; they're all there as dogs of war, the mercenary units available to compensate for your army's deficiencies.

Games Workshop are all for games developers interpreting the *Warhammer* universes away from their dice-rolling origins, and *Dawn Of War* was an excellent take on the futuristic *Warhammer* licence that provided the gameplay roots for the even more excellent *Company Of Heroes*. The apple's fallen a little closer to the tree with *Mark Of Chaos*, but when your tree is *Warhammer*, that's no bad thing. **PC**

WHY YOU SHOULD BE EXCITED...

DROWNING EMPIRE

These swordsmen are stronger than the goblins, and have little flaps over their bums. A stylish way to wage war.

SKY AT FIGHT

Warhammer – a universe in eternal turmoil. As such, skies are rarely blue; unless it's to provide an amusing contrast to the blood-red of the soil.

GREENSKINS

Goblins are one of the greenskins. They're filthy swine, as well as the game's source of idiot humour. They may be stupid, but they can't half slice you up.

REST IN PEACE

This is your tabletop, your warzone, your world. The only peace is before you start.

YOUR HERO

This is your hero. Give him powers, dress him in enchanted crap, then get him to thump a goblin.

Mark Of Chaos feels much closer to its tabletop roots than *Dawn Of War*

Mark Of Chaos feels rooted in the tabletop game, without the existential horror of painting trolls.

CAESAR IV



Jon Blyth discovers that Rome is one grain-hungry lady

DEVELOPER Tilted Mill Entertainment PUBLISHER VU Games WEBSITE www.caesariv.com PREVIOUSLY IN... N/A

THE FIRST THING is, you don't play *Caesar*. So this game isn't about randy carpet sex with Egyptians and rolling around in milk and filling his fiddle with horse piss. Which is what Emperors do, for your information. As the mayor of a small town, you'll instead be overseeing the construction of your buildings, receiving messages from Rome saying, "We want grain, we're really hungry", and dealing with Jupiter getting narky and burning down your apothecary. This was 50-odd years before the Christian god done a Jesus, and those old-time deities are really making the most of it...

9:25 THE PLEBS ARE REVOLTING

It looks like Caesar has given me a free road to start off my town. On autopilot a little, I try to build a town hall. There isn't one, so I build a few small houses for some plebs. That's apparently the proper name for them, and they don't mind it at all. When the game tells me the area isn't desirable enough for plebs, I put on a glove puppet and say, in a posh voice, "Picky swine, these plebs". As my wrist swings from the monitor to my face, Reverend Bojangles looks around and replies in a cruel sneer: "Crush them all, Mr Blyth, they are disposable nothings from ill stock."



9.36 THAT OL' TIME RELIGION

With refreshingly little direction from the game, I start building everything I possibly can. I reason that a mayor's town will fail or thrive not on whether its buildings have adequate resources within their spheres of influence. I reckon, as long as I can bluff it when you get a visiting dignitary, I'll be OK. I can imagine it now: "As you can see, Caesar, I've built loads of temples and there's a couple of ace wells too." And Caesar would say: "That's well holy, is that. Temples are wicked as."



9:45 LIBRARIES GAVE US POWER

I'm a bit worried now. I've built the library between the amphitheatre and the plebs' homes. This is possibly a mistake – the rowdy crowds will go screaming past the library on match days, causing all the librarians to furrow their brows. As it turns out, the pleb classes couldn't give a toss about books, and are too ill to be bothered with the amphitheatre. I think I may well have been jumping ahead of myself here. I turn my attention, grudgingly, to basic health and water supply.



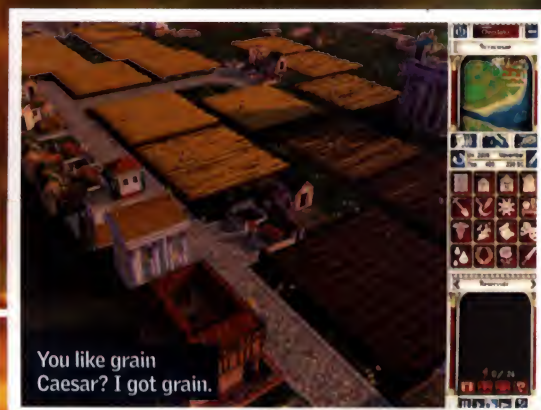


10:00 I'M ONLY HAPPY WHEN IT'S GRAIN

After fannying about for some minutes with equal gusto and aplomb, word comes from Rome. They want grain, and plenty of it. Now, I curse the freedom I was given earlier. I took that time to fill my fields with adorable cows, to see if you can hear them moo when you zoom in really close. And now Rome wants grain. I check my goals and find that sure enough, cows have nothing to do with it. I find more fertile land and quickly grow some grain. Rome seems perky, and tells me: "You are no longer failing. Carry on like this and you may reach mediocrity." Ruddy cheek!

10:15 DUSKY SPRINGFIELD

They want grain? I'll give them grain. I'll build more grain fields than could be strategically useful. I'm so keen to show Rome who the new grain-growing daddy in the Empire is, that I build grain fields well into the night. Stupid Caesar. If this petulant approach to town planning seems unprofessional, you haven't seen my blueprints for a massive statue of Caesar going cross-eyed with his arse hanging out.



11:20 DOCTOR, DOCTOR...

After leaving the computer for a while to attend to myself in the toilets, cafeterias and hot tubs of our luxurious office complex, I return to find that Jupiter has vented some considerable wrath on a couple of my buildings. I check my row of temples, and the daft tart's only gone and lightning-ed his own chapel. Also, people are sneezing everywhere, so I build a doctor's office and look for a Fitness First in the big menus.



11:40 FICKLE GOD SHOCKER!

Inspecting the rest of my buildings, it seems that Jupiter went proper crazy-berserk on my town. I mean, honestly. If it's not one thing, it's another. Caesar in one ear, going on about grain. "Ooh, I'm Julius Caesar, and I'm hungry. Can I have a bit of grain please? I am Caesar after all, and my tummy really aches." Then Jupiter gets the arse, about quite literally god-knows-what. It's enough to drive a loyal subject to rebellion. But how do you get revenge on a god? What would grab the attention of those whimsical dice-rolling bastards?



11:55 TAKE THAT, JUPITER

Yeah? Take that. That's you, that is, Jupiter. That's you on the weekend. That's you on your best behaviour, because you've got a job interview. And that woman on the left? That's your interviewer. She just asked you whether you worked well as part of a team, and you went "I LIKE BOOBIES" and chased her around the desk. Meanwhile, thanks to a catalogue of catastrophic decisions, unemployment and illness are running amok in my townsfolk. Apparently Rome thinks I'm rubbish. Well, good. I never liked them anyway. I'm going to get my lunch.



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STRAIN

WHAT'S YOUR GAME?

The rain on *Guild Wars: Nightfall's* plains falls mainly due to Jeff Strain. Suzy Wallace investigates...

Who are ya?



NAME Jeff Strain

DEVELOPER

ArenaNet

POSITION

Executive producer

AGE 37

GAMES WORKED

ON BEFORE

StarCraft, *StarCraft: Brood War*,
Warcraft III, *World Of Warcraft*

FAVOURITE GAME

Final Fantasy Tactics



Q How does *Nightfall* continue the story of *Prophecies* and *Factions*?

A "I call it the third instalment of a trilogy: the original game took place on the continent of Tyria, and *Factions* took place on an entirely different continent – the continent of Cantha. Now we've come back to a new land, by the name of Elona – but it's contiguous with the original continent. Players from the original *Prophecies* campaign will remember that there was a large area called the Crystal Desert. In the south-east of that, there was an entire other section of the continent – and that's Elona, where the story picks up. A lot of the creatures, the boss monsters and the lore that the players were introduced to as they crossed the Crystal Desert in the first campaign will now be fully explored. *Nightfall* is really designed to take a lot of the story threads and take them to a satisfying conclusion."

Why did you choose a more African theme?

"It's not really an African theme – one of the things we try to do is take mythologies, cultural elements and different fantasy traditions from different parts of the world and explore them with a fantasy twist. So what you'll find in *Nightfall*, in terms of the architecture, creatures, the colour palettes we chose and the feel of the story itself, all have a North African flavour. It's not a representation of North Africa, it's a fantastical rendition."

"The characters you meet, the way they talk, the languages, the clothing, the materials used in the construction of the buildings, the outlines of the sky against the cityscape – everything is always unique in every individual campaign in *Guild Wars*. We want them to stand apart from each other."

What with the different real-world cultural foundations of the *Guild Wars* instalments, do you have to be careful what you portray?

"In all honesty, in this case we have to treat it very, very delicately. World events are going on, in particular in Northern and Central Africa. With ongoing wars, we have to be very careful about the rendition of children and of people in the game – we have to be careful to be respectful of every single nuance of culture."

Have you had to change anything because of that?

"In one case, we found that we had a character who was portrayed as a child who was a little more militaristic than he should have been – in other words, he had a weapon. What with all the problems in Africa with children being conscripted into revolutionary armies, we decided to completely rewrite that section of the game to make sure there was no nuance of that whatsoever. That's something we're constantly analysing, and we feel confident this is a very positive and affirming portrayal of these cultural elements."

The characters we've seen in the new Dervish role look fantastic. What can you tell us about them?

"The Dervish is a truly visually-striking character – peering out from the hood with these piercing green eyes – but in motion, she's breathtaking. The way she whirls, the way she moves: the kinetic motion and the flowing cloth – we're really excited about that."

"Beyond that, her skill package is very unique – she can take on the visage of one of the five gods in the game – taking their form for a period of time. It's exciting for people to be able to morph into these huge, towering godlike forms and wreak



Nightfall is due to be the first MMOG to feature in-stream fighting.

"The Dervish is a striking character with piercing green eyes – and in motion, she's simply breathtaking"



It isn't *actually* set at night...



"First to find Moses wins!"

destruction on the battlefield. That's probably her main draw."

How do you come up with new monster designs?

"It's a lengthy process. In your traditional fantasy setting, there's a lot of monsters that everybody knows and expects – a dragon, a dead skeleton – standard fantasy creatures. The goal with our creatures is to introduce fresh concepts to the game, but still make them draw from that fantasy tradition – so you're somewhat aware of what they are and what they do."

"When we start designing creatures, we start with the more cultural elements of the world we're building, and look at some of the natural creatures that would be in that kind of setting. Then we take those and

morph them into more fantastical and often threatening versions. It's a lengthy process – we probably get through a thousand different proposed monster designs before they're selected into the hundred or so that actually go into the game."

So are we likely to see any killer giraffes in *Nightfall*?

"Killer giraffes? No, I don't think we're going to see any killer giraffes. The key rule of making any role-playing game is that it has to be cool – it's more important to be cool than accurate."

Depends on how much you like giraffes really...

"That's true. But I've never been particularly threatened by a giraffe."

JEFF STRAIN

Where he turns for inspiration...

GEORGE R.R. MARTIN



FANTASY: Novels like George RR Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* series "are absolutely fantastic".



THE LOTR MOVIES: "If you're working in the fantasy genre, these will move and influence you."



FINAL FANTASY: Jeff is a fan due to its iconic and distinctive stylings and stupendous gameplay.



Penis-headed monsters: frowned upon.

MANY BOTHANS DIED...

There's a *Star Wars* game due out next year, but what will it be like? *Will Porter* shares his thoughts...

It's common knowledge that LucasArts' next foray into the *Star Wars* universe will be no-holds-barred actioner with some startling physics-led Force powers. But information is so disparate and wobbly that we thought it high-time to collate all the individual nuggets of midichlorian juice that we're aware of into one glorious whole...

So is it a Darth Vader game then?

Probably not actually. As you can see here, a preview of what the game would look like was conjured up by the bods at LucasArts for the benefit of none other than George Lucas himself – and although it's all clearly pre-rendered, there are many clues as to the sort of heroes that'll be present within the game. They're young, they don't appear to be dark-side, they have attacks that can knock around many stormtroopers at once – and they have physics-based Force powers (dark and light) that can manipulate both enemies and environment. Most notably, a

stormtrooper hurled onto a metal outcrop, the metal outcrop itself being pulled to the floor and then the whole crumpled mess being used to take out a low-flying TIE Fighter.

So what's the official line?

Jim Ward, president of LucasArts, has gone on record to state that a new *Star Wars* game will be released next year to coincide with the 30th anniversary of *A New Hope* – a date that sits in the calendar towards the end of May. The game is said to fill in the blanks

between *Episodes III* and *IV* – presumably mapping the rise of Vader through the ranks. The game will also be a launch platform for a shitload of new *Star Wars* toys – so expect plenty of new characters and vehicles, plus huge amounts of coverage by the media (us).



Tell me more about the physics

LucasArts are using what they're doing in the new Indy game, animating Mr Jones on-the-fly so that it keys in with the physics of his motion and his environment, and then some. A new technology known as Digital Molecular Matter allows them to assign accurate physical values to varied substances that the game world will be comprised of – wood will split as wood does (and not along preset lines), ice will

shatter and slide, and malleable items will be moulded and smudged as you force-chuck items into them. For example, if there's a huge heavy statue embedded in a crystalline structure, they'll have independent physical values so if you start knocking about the green crystal at the bottom the statue will slowly collapse, cracking its base as it goes, before slamming into the ground and breaking into weighty pieces.



Who are the main characters?

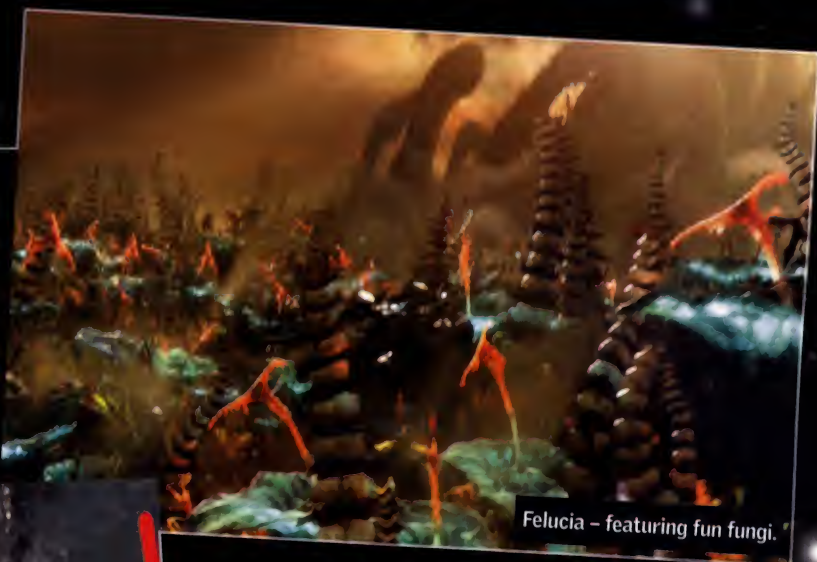
Darth Vader is certainly in it, and art present at E3 suggests he has four bounty-hunter types in his tutelage: two humans, a droid not unlike General Greivous and a bug-eyed green guy who's partial to thermal detonators. Light-side wise, as mentioned before, there appear to be three young Jedi characters, so it's safe to assume they'll have some sort of mentor in the game.



Where will the game be set?

Lucas artwork released through their Hyperspace insiders service shows Star Destroyers hovering low above Alderaan, a former Jedi inspecting a destroyed Jedi Council Chamber, a junk planet that's a ship graveyard and some serious action on the Wookiee home-planet of

Kashyyyk. A tech-demo location seen by *ZONE*, meanwhile, is the fungus planet of Felucia – seen briefly in the Jedi massacre in *Revenge Of The Sith* – where huge toadstool affairs and odd cactus-things swayed in the breeze beneath a sky filled with Imperial metal.



Felucia – featuring fun fungi.



Kashyyyk: yes, that's three 'y's.

Any specific locations?

Also in the tech demo seen by *PC ZONE* was a museum in which a massive Rancor skeleton was hanging from the ceiling, all rendered in DMM and all joyously destructible. Otherwise, artwork would

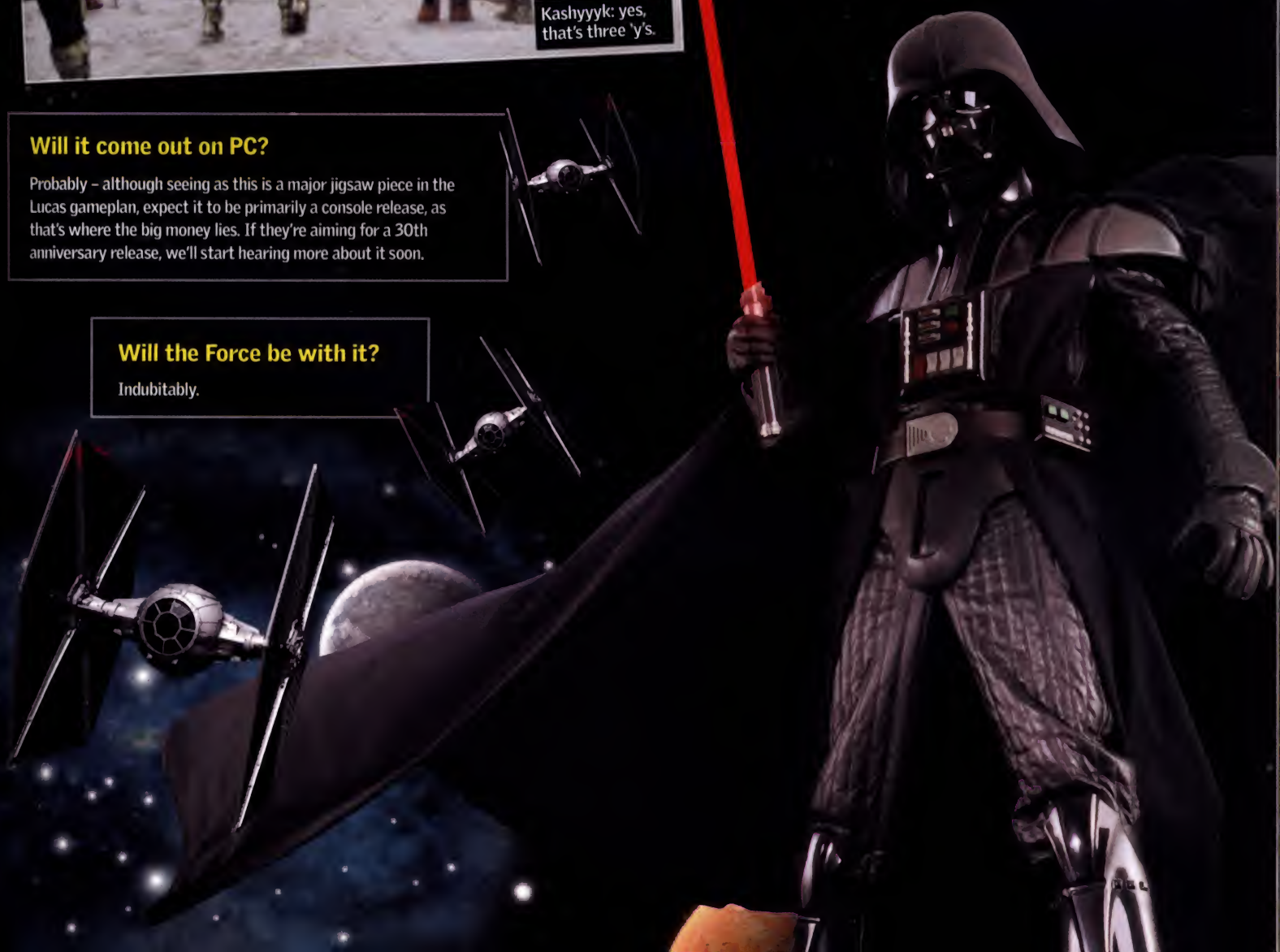
suggest that the Sand People of Tatooine are back – with an underground, skeleton-filled sepulchre gloomily present. Expect to fight a few Rancors on their home turf – and quite a few at the same time at that.

Will it come out on PC?

Probably – although seeing as this is a major jigsaw piece in the Lucas gameplan, expect it to be primarily a console release, as that's where the big money lies. If they're aiming for a 30th anniversary release, we'll start hearing more about it soon.

Will the Force be with it?

Indubitably.





PARABELLUM

DEVELOPER Acony PUBLISHER TBA WEBSITE www.aconygames.com ETA 2007

YOU MIGHT HAVE heard of a little game called *Counter-Strike*, a game so unsurpassed in its popularity that no commercial multiplayer release has dared openly mimic its counter-terrorist/terrorist dynamic. A copycat game would be commercial suicide, wouldn't it? Well, German developers Acony reckon their Unreal Engine 3 game of multiplayer shooty-bang-bangs will be a definite challenger in the world of violent bomb defusal – and they've brought a bulging bag of fresh gameplay ideas along with them to prove it. Roll VT!

The Bigger Picture

1 NU-CLEAR BOUNDS

This is what you see come the game's end – fiery, nuclear death and a cascading dust cloud not unlike that seen in the closing moments of *F.E.A.R.*. Given a strict time limit, it was Delta team's job to roam the 12 maps of *Parabellum*'s US city to find the bomb – but clearly they b0rked it.

2 TREASURE HUNT

At the start, the Deltas get a choice of the 12 maps to search through, this one being an industrial affair packed with odd factory machines and building sites. If they win the battle and the bomb isn't there, they can move to an adjacent map and try there instead, while the timer slowly ticks down...

3 UNDERGROUND, OVERGROUND

Here we are in the adjacent map chosen by the Deltas – a subway system that's not unlike Washington DC's. If representatives of the terrorist team have guessed that this is where the Deltas would be heading next, they can spawn slightly earlier to set up ambushes.

4 TOOL-UP

This chap has selected a load-out that simply features dual handguns, so with the reduced weight he'll be a lot speedier than his heavy-gunning companions. In the load-out screen, you'll also get to fiddle with ammo, range and rate of fire.

5 BOUNCING THROUGH THE WALLS

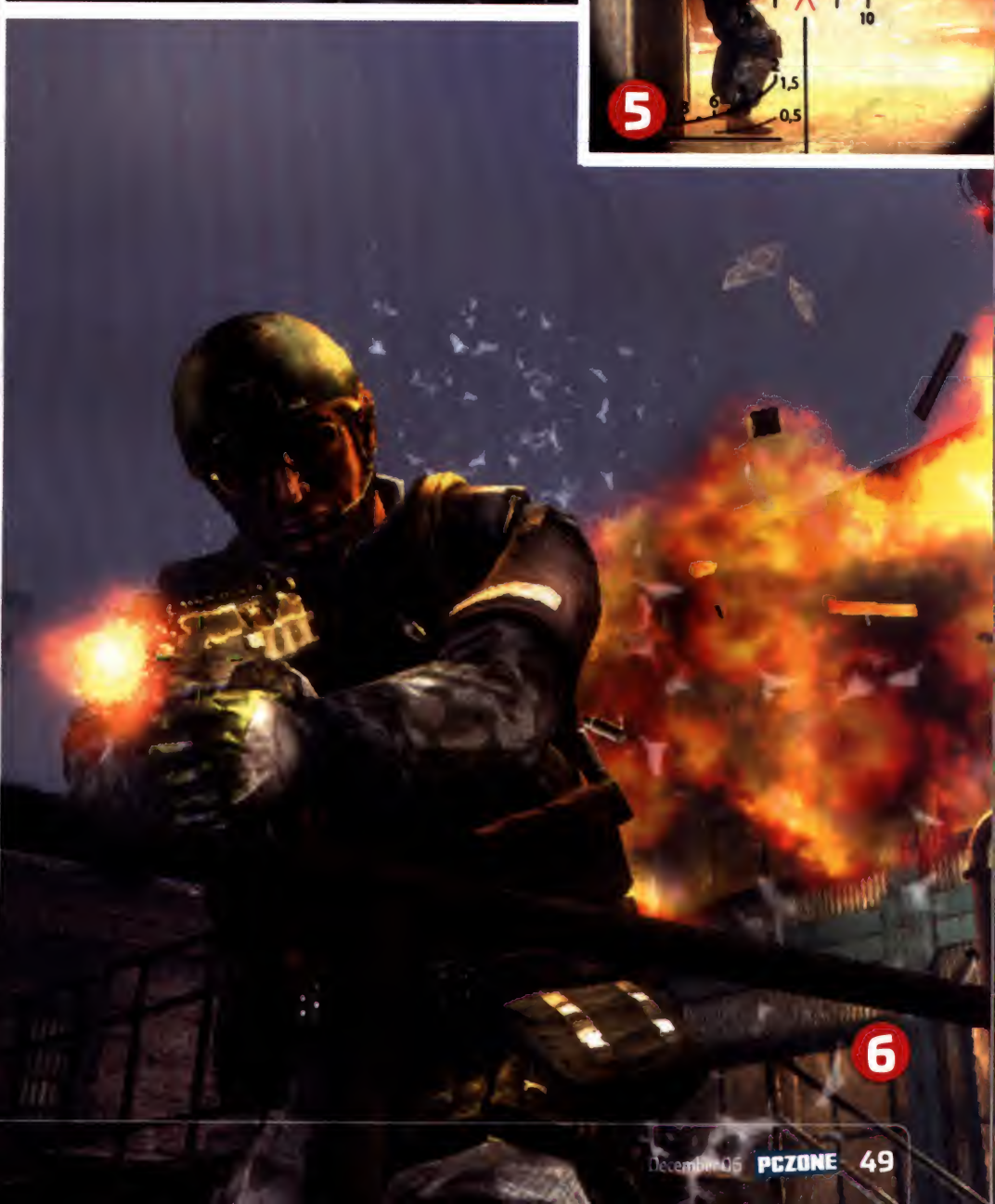
When it comes to snipage and accurate gunnage, there'll be a brand of ammo that'll embed itself metres and metres through solid walls – meaning that sometimes taking cover just won't be enough. This also means that one bullet will be able to take out several enemies at once.

6 ACCESS DENIED

Destruction is a frequent sight in *Parabellum*, and in their attempts to slow or divert the progression of the Delta team, terrorists will be able to blast apart bridges and platforms that might be needed – thankfully for the good guys though, there'll be four different paths through each map.

7 THE INCIDENTAL THINGS

Acony are clearly enjoying what they can get out of Unreal Engine 3 – as you can see here, smoke effects are fairly lovely, while elsewhere explosions and driving rain are equally impressive. If only the name *Parabellum* didn't sound a bit shit...



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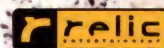
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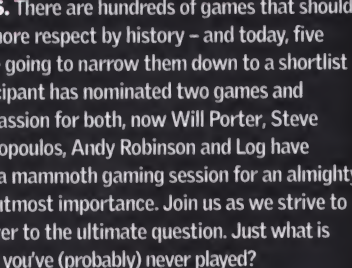
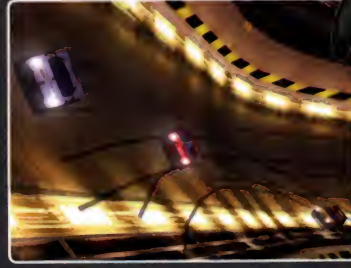
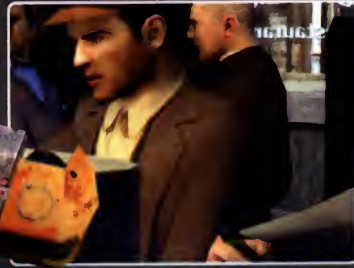
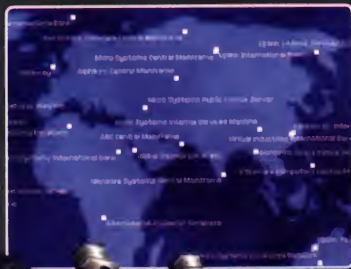


www.thq.co.uk



THE GREATEST GAMES THAT YOU'VE (PROBABLY) NEVER PLAYED

The *PC ZONE* team throw commercially-ignored classics into the limelight, in a quest to unearth the games that deserved so much more of the nation's love, time and money



THE DEAL IS THIS. There are hundreds of games that should have been given more respect by history – and today, five *PC ZONE* bods are going to narrow them down to a shortlist of ten. Each participant has nominated two games and underlined their passion for both, now Will Porter, Steve Hogarty, Dan Griliopoulos, Andy Robinson and Log have reconvened after a mammoth gaming session for an almighty discussion of the utmost importance. Join us as we strive to discover the answer to the ultimate question. Just what is the greatest game you've (probably) never played?

OMIKRON: THE NOMAD SOUL

Find it: Knocking about on eBay for a couple of quid
As put forward by: Log

You haven't lived until you've played this game because:

First, the introduction includes the most endearingly earnest yet embarrassing way of explaining how you 'control a videogame character'. You transfer your soul, you see. Yes, you the 'player' – this is after all the creation of insane genius David Cage, who would later stun and awe with *Fahrenheit*.

Then you're made to listen to an unskippable Bowie track dedicated to the city of Omikron. Only then are you allowed to walk around the town and try to work out what you're supposed to be doing.

The level of freedom was amazing for the time; all the doors to the buildings open for you and you've got a proper home with a woman who you



"People thought Bowie had gone god-happy and released a death metal game to convert us all"



can climb into bed with. Although there's no sheets and you never seem to take your clothes off. Mainly, you should play it because it's got triangular coins, pyramidal medkits and Bowie piping up occasionally. The shape of coins defines how messed-up a universe is. Triangular coins would gouge holes in your pockets. They'd dig in when you sat down. It's brilliant madness.

People probably didn't play it because:

Phwoo, god knows. Perhaps the title made everyone think it was about Jesus, or something. The stuff Bowie was releasing at the time – *Seven*, *Survive* – hardly turned out to be career-defining classics, and the cover art was an eyeball with a skull in the pupil, which is a bit naff. That's probably it. People thought Bowie had gone god-happy and released a death metal game to convert us all.

Stand-out moment of brilliance:

There's something about your wife that's excellent. I can't tell you because you've got to go and get it off eBay or Amazon and play it through yourself.

10



A brief moment of post-coital introspection.

But it's something that'll shock you to your core. Don't read the following sentence backwards if you don't want to know! Named a S'ehs Gmo.

The panel's views:

Steve: "I can see why this is here, but it's a pretty clunky game to play these days."

Will: "I like it because it's so joyously different, even if it has got a few faults – it does look dated now, and the fighting is rubbish. I just wish that after I'd completed *Deus Ex* someone had told me that a game existed that was almost as clever..."

The conclusion:

So off-the-wall that you really should give it a go.



FREEDOM FIGHTERS

Find it: On the high street or on Amazon.co.uk, for a pittance
As put forward by: Andy

You haven't lived until you've played this game because:

In 2003, Io Interactive took a break from its seminal *Hitman* series to create this brilliant third-person shooter which brought squad-based combat and shooting at communists to the masses. In an alternate universe where the Soviet Union built the A-bomb first, you control a plumber-come-freedom-fighter who leads the rebellion to free New York City from the Iron Curtain and kick those Soviets back to where they came from – Russia.

The visual style is colourful and wonderfully animated, with the barking Russian choral music providing a superb, atmospheric soundtrack that's up there with the likes of *Halo* and *Deus Ex*. The simple squad controls were perhaps the game's biggest hurrah, which had your AI team-mates follow your lead when uninstructed, and hold their own in most occasions,

keeping gameplay rolling without a hitch and making the game more accessible to the gaming ignorant. *Freedom Fighters*, I salute you.

People probably didn't play it because:

Doomed to be dismissed as yet another generic third-person actioner, *Freedom Fighters* didn't exactly explode at retail. Appreciation for the game also seems to have increased with age – while we gave it a respectable 75% way back when, the significance of the game's squad interface and the simple joy of its gameplay went sadly unnoticed.

Stand-out moment of brilliance:

Heading back to your sewer base after a mission well done, only to be ambushed by Soviets from all sides and having to fight your way through the red war machine thereafter. Totally unexpected and a real blast to play

9



– the 'big twist' that followed was unfortunately a bit more obvious.

The panel's views:

Will: "It's brilliant, stupid fun. It's just so smooth and easy."

Log: "I don't like over-complicated squad shooting, so this is great. The music's amazing too – all that Russian stuff."

The conclusion:

Deserved more freedom, but no-one fought for it. Bastards.



NO ONE LIVES FOREVER 2: A SPY IN H.A.R.M.'S WAY

8

Find it: On Amazon or eBay, or if you're lucky, on the high street

As put forward by: Andy

You haven't lived until you've played this game because:

The sequel to Monolith's colourful spy shooter addresses most of the qualms of the first *NOLF*, while tweaking enemy AI and improving visuals with a facial animation system and one of the earliest implementations of ragdoll physics. Unlike other FPS games of the year that focused on the multiplayer arena, *NOLF2* offered a solid single-player experience with a script that made you feel like you truly were an Avenger and a (wo)man from *UNCLE* combined. Aesthetically, the game is wonderfully designed to give off that '60s spy-movie feel, with a wonderful soundtrack, constant superbly written one-liners and a distinctive art style that looks like it's taken straight from Austin Powers' bed sheets. *NOLF2*'s updated roster of outlandish gadgets also left fond memories in our collective craniums; favourites including the robotic poodle, the body-erasing perfume spray and the robotic bomb disguised as an adorable kitten – which I'm reminded to tell you is switched on by sticking a finger firmly up its arse.

People probably didn't play it because:

We reckon *NOLF2*'s retail downfall was mostly to do with its kooky art style and outlandish design, which turned off mainstream gamers looking for a serious FPS fix. Having a leading lady didn't help much either, as the failed experiment in replacing her with *Contract* J.A.C.K. clearly went on to show.

Stand-out moment of brilliance:

The trailer-park scene where a massive, approaching tornado whips up everything around you, scattering massive trailers and power-lines in its wake. Eventually, you end up fighting ninjas inside a house floating in mid-air – a set-piece that could only have been bettered if the house was on fire and pirates fought alongside your ninja foes.

The panel's views:

Dan: "It's perfect kitsch, camp Bond stuff."

Will: "It really makes you feel like you're in the *Avengers* or whatever, and like a lot of these games, it just nails the mood and atmosphere of the game. The level design is also brilliant, and in a time where every game concentrated on generic bad-man shooting, it genuinely did some very different things. And it also doesn't look or feel dated at all."

Steve: "Don't forget about the crap stealth bits though."

Conclusion:

Cate didn't live forever, but she always will. In our hearts...



A body-removing perfume?
Invent this now!



NOLF2 is remarkably undated in either looks or gameplay.



VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE – BLOODLINES

Find it: On the high street, as it's not that old. Or Amazon.co.uk

As put forward by: Dan

You haven't lived until you've played this game because:

While it wasn't as beautiful as *Half-Life 2*, *Vampire* made good use of the engine to create a nightmarish version of LA, based on the *White Wolf* RPG. And what a sense of humour too...

The amputation-fetishist attacking you with a severed mannequin limb; the *Evil Dead* mini-game in the graveyard; the werewolf, golem and Chinese-monster scenes where you realise you're not the nastiest thing this world has to offer; the four-way split-ending; the crazy combat and the multiple paths through every level; the enormously varied character classes; the endless moral and political content expressed through the exposition of the world. This is *Deus Ex* with vampires, and each time you play it rewards you.

People probably didn't play it because:

It was rushed out on the same day as *Half-Life 2* was released! Duh, Activision! Also, developers Troika were shut down on the same day, so patches were left to the fans. Which was a problem because you couldn't finish the released version, due to a bug halfway through the game.

Stand-out moment of brilliance:

The old hotel in Santa Monica. This turns out to be a near-perfect in-game version of *The Shining*, full of poltergeists, kids' toys and a flashback that ends with you running through flames and plummeting through the vanishing ghostly floor of the hotel.

The panel's views:

Steve: "It's got that one with the big tits who looks like Britney Spears in it!"

Dan: "And the twist with her, which I won't say out loud, is just ingenious."

Will: "I like *Vampire* as it's been ignored: Troika have gone bust, Activision aren't interested – but there's a community that keeps it going with fan-made patches."

The conclusion

The best buggy game ever released. God bless Troika, wherever they are now.



MAFIA

Find it: For a fiver on the Sold Out budget range

As put forward by: Dan



You haven't lived until you've played this game because:

It's 2002 and *Grand Theft Auto 3's* been out for six months when Illusion Softworks show off their masterpiece. It's a perfect recreation of 1930s America, very admirable. What's more, you explore it all from the point of view of a cabbie who slowly turns into a Mafia goon as the game progresses.

It's got violence, history, varied missions, an enormous city to explore and production values that haven't been trumped. Vehicles are slow and handle badly (hence accurately), the streets feel alive and it's fiendishly tough. The story is well told (in flashback) and, if that bores you, there's two Free Ride modes so you can just explore the authentic-looking city of Lost Heaven.

Add in excellent music, awesome characterisation and animation, plus the fact that it plays and looks better than

The Godfather which was released four years later, and you understand why it was so highly rated across the board.

People probably didn't play it because:

Illusion Softworks also made *Hidden & Dangerous 2* and neither sold that well. As the relevant companies marketed the product well, we guess word-of-mouth didn't spread. They were tough, intelligent simulations, if their system specifications were a little high; perhaps the public just want something simpler? Or perhaps they were still playing *GTA3*? Finally, releasing the same month as *Medieval: Total War* and *Max Payne* might have been a bit unlucky.

Stand-out moment of brilliance:

Speeding. Give your hard-handling jalopy too much gas, run a red light or prang another car and the cops will



chase you down relentlessly, just like real life. However, they won't shoot you for that; you'll just get a speeding ticket and a fine. If they spot a gun though...

The panel's views:

Will: "I love the music – there's no other game I've ever played that automatically just puts you so easily into the mood and setting. At first, I was bitching about getting stopped by the police for speeding etc, but then I just realised that it was all part of the game." Steve: "It's got fantastic voice-acting as well, and it still looks great even now. It just nails the whole 1920s thing – and the missions are really inventive. Like getting the Canadian whisky – going out into the countryside and having a shootout on a farm."

The conclusion:

Better than *Goodfellas*. That's the film, not the pizzas.



TRACKMANIA: SUNRISE

Find it: There's a free version online, *TrackMania Nations*. *Sunrise* is now under £20 too
As put forward by: Steve

You haven't lived until you've played this game because:

Travelling at over 800 arbitrary units of speed towards a ramp that arcs skywards in a sort of building-sized half-pipe shape, noticing the ramp you're trying to land on is about half a mile thataway, angling your car at the precise moment you leave the cusp of the ramp, sailing through the air, missing the mark, landing in the sea and happily resetting to the last checkpoint to try again. That's what racing games should be all about.

Get a few players on a server and *TM: Sunrise* becomes a furore of stunts, tricks and lap times, with each player attempting to shave milliseconds off the high score. *TM: Sunrise* is a sublime, and almost perfect, stunt-filled arcade racer. It's still pretty too.

People probably didn't play it because:

It was a low-key release from now-defunct Digital Jesters, popular in France but quite unknown elsewhere. Lack of collision detection might also have confused casual gamers.

Stand-out moment of brilliance:

The first time you get a bunch of friends playing on a single server, especially if you play on a bunch of fan-made maps none of you have played before.

The panel's views:

Log: "I'm not a fan of racing, but here, I was made to feel quite good at it, and then I got better – you get a bronze medal just for being the worst in the world, which is very welcome." Andy: "It's just bloody brilliant! You can drive cars up really big ramps!"

The conclusion:

Gallic genius – that goes really, really, really fast!



She's called Jade, and her lips and eyes are green! Do you see?



BEYOND GOOD & EVIL

Find it: For a tenner on Play.com
As put forward by: Will

4

You haven't lived until you've played this game because:

Where to start? *Beyond Good & Evil* puts you in a world inhabited by animals under siege, and indeed under control, by a vicious alien contingent known as the DomZ, intent on harvesting the good people of Hillys for their own wicked ends. All this, *and* it's named after a major philosophical work by Nietzsche, a man whose work had rarely been occupied by Rastafarian rhinos prior to this game's release.

Whether you're running around your lighthouse home with your dog Woof, taking photos of the flora and fauna of Hillys in your role of photo-journalist or creeping around secret DomZ bases with either your pig uncle Pey'J or incompetent hero Double-H, *Beyond Good & Evil* is never anything less than a delight. Perhaps, just perhaps, it's better on console – but it genuinely tugs at the heartstrings (those poor orphans...), and has a heart of absolute gold.

People probably didn't play it because:

Because they're heathens. Evil, despicable heathens who wouldn't know gaming if it bit them on their obese buttocks. For some reason, a woman with a camera and delectable green-

gloss lippy didn't cut the mustard. Proof positive that everyone else but you and I are the utmost of buffoons.

Stand-out moment of brilliance:

Hard one this. I'd say that the lighthouse destruction sequence is up there, as are the moments directly preceding your entry into space late in the game (which isn't actually much cop when you get up there). However, for ultimate satisfaction, getting a good photo of that whale leaping out of the water is the best it gets.

The panel's views:

Andy: "I think it's really hard to make a smart, fresh adventure game – but there's a lot of stuff in here that's completely new. The AI co-op, the slow-motion, the taking photos, the vehicle stuff – and the voice-acting's really good as well. It even looks good today, and it's what – three years old?"
Dan: "You forget how many great features there were in there – it's got more forgotten glories than any other game, because no-one played it..."

The conclusion

The green-lipped beauty of Jade gets another outing in *PC ZONE*. Long may she reign.

TRIBES: VENGEANCE

Find it: Recently seen in Virgin for a quid, and on Play.com for three.
As put forward by: Will

3



You haven't lived until you've played this game because:

OK, so I'm not talking about the multiplayer here. I'm talking about a silky-smooth single-player game with silky-smooth narrative that leaps between characters and time-frames with consummate ease. I'm also talking about one of the coolest villains in PC gaming – the metal cyborg Mercury, who you control in the best parts of the game, is astonishingly good fun to ski and slide around his massive levels.

I just love this game – even if you strip away the action, the shooting and the story, the way it plays just feels like relaxing in a warm, soapy bath. Admittedly, at first the petulant princesses are a touch annoying, and the plot's family orientation occasionally gets *Coronation Street*-y, but my god more people should play this game. It's satisfaction bottled, blended and sieved straight onto a DVD. I love it.

People probably didn't play it because:

The *Tribes* community didn't like the multiplayer, shouted about it and ignored it as much as they could. VU were a bit sniffy about it and didn't even release a patch that Irrational had made for it. What's more, the game was abysmally marketed in the US, and suffered from the old chestnut of having female lead characters in an FPS. Don't they know we prefer boys?

Stand-out moment of brilliance:

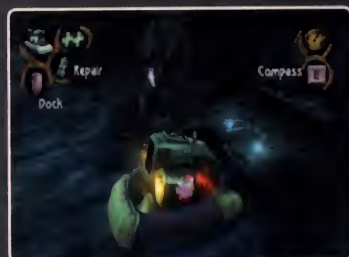
Probably the wonderful touch of having you play as Julia when she's only six years old, and running around an imperial palace while it's under siege. There aren't many games that see young girls being traumatised through incessant destruction and accompanied by giant killing machines. Apart from maybe in *Bioshock*. Irrational are odd ones, aren't they?

The panel's views:

Steve: "What other game has you at one point trying to assassinate a player who you've controlled, at another point playing an interplanetary sports star and at another that same person as a six-year-old kid?"
Log: "I just instantly got into this – the controls are friendly and simple. The feeling when you land on a perfect incline and scoop yourself up again is just f***ing marvellous."

The conclusion:

For the love of god, just play this game. It's a gem.



Possibly the most action-packed princess adventure ever....

PSYCHONAUTS

Find it: On Steam, or for £29.99 in shops
As put forward by: Log

You haven't lived until you've played this game because:

If you weren't adventure-minded, the best thing games like *Maniac Mansion* and *Day Of The Tentacle* had to offer was their sense of humour. They may well have been the funniest games around, but for those poor individuals who didn't suffer from object-combining Asperger's, it was a laborious process getting to the jokes.

Psychonauts drops you straight into the most visually-inventive 3D platformer I've ever played, and combines a really strong script with fantastic acting and solid – if occasionally erratic – gameplay. You play Raz, a psychic who's being trained

in the art of going into people's minds and sorting out their emotional problems, and it never once veers into the obvious territory that must have been sorely tempting. I'd have killed my father if Double Fine had referenced Freud. The fact this game didn't sell a million is heartbreaking.

People probably didn't play it because:

Well, it looks great in action, but screenshots didn't do it any justice whatsoever. It just looked like an ordinary platformer with a degree of wackiness. The word 'wacky' sells *Psychonauts* short by a dozen miles... It's intelligent, coherent and funny, and

manages to tie all that into a game you really want to finish. I'll even forgive a couple of moments of atrocious level design for the utter humanity that went into the game. Pardon my gush.

Stand-out moment of brilliance:

In the lungfish level, you enter the mind of a defeated boss – a brainwashed mutant lungfish – to see why he's turned hostile. Suddenly, you're the star in a B-movie where you're the monster in a town of tiny lungfish, and the villain (who's brainwashed the fish) is the hero. Utterly beyond excellent.



The panel's

Steve: "It's hilarious and funny, but in a very clever way. I just love the design of it – but it's not a brilliant platform game – it can't quite stand on its own two feet. Otherwise, it's just great." Dan: "It's got a clever script and the characters are wonderfully created. The way you explore the worlds in the heads of each person is great too – from the rotating perfect cube of the repressed teacher, right to the absolute madness of the people in the asylum..."

Steve: "There are far too many things to collect in it though. Which is why I demand that *Uplink* win."

The conclusion:

Tim Schafer is a god among men. The funniest game on PC.



UPLINK

Find it: On Steam for £6
As put forward by: Steve

You haven't lived until you've played this game because:

Uplink is Introversion's masterpiece. It never drops the pretence of being anything other than reality, drawing you into a world of freelance hacking. Not real hacking mind, because that's boring and involves installing Linux, but proper movie-style hacking with timers counting down to the moment your invasions are detected and traced, and screens of jumbled numbers turning to zero digit-by-digit as you decipher them.

Entirely freeform, it's possibly the most tense thing you'll ever play, and trust me when I say you could easily pack hours into it without noticing. Once the storyline starts you'll be irreversibly hooked too.

Uplink is best described as *Elite* minus spaceships, minus travelling, plus hacking, multiplied by tension, all divided by *Swordfish* – a genuinely unique and enthralling experience, overlooked by so many. You owe it to the nerd inside of you to play this, especially considering it's now only £6.

People probably didn't play it because:

Duh, look at it. The closest it comes to any real graphical output is a low-res world map and some LAN schematics – people seem to forget how much fun you can have with text and buttons and bleeping noises. There are no guns, no tits and lots of bits where you have to type. People just don't understand it.

Stand-out moment of brilliance:

Being contracted to ruin a man's life by whatever means necessary. Personally, I decided to hack into the Global Criminal Database and add 'murder', 'breaking parole' and for the hell of it, 'sex with an ape' to this guy's criminal record. Once I authorised his arrest, his misdeeds hit the news within three hours. Job done.

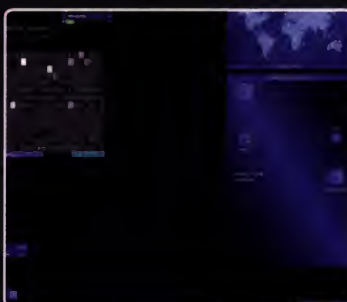
The panel's view:

Will: "Of all these games, it's the most unappreciated for everything it's done. It's also the least played."

Log: "With *Psychonauts*, you can see someone else being clever; with *Uplink*,



It looks like geography, but it's brilliant!



it's making you feel clever – it really gives you a ball-tingle when you're playing it. Even the tutorial isn't too explainy, making you work things out."

The conclusion:

A total surprise winner. It came in as a game that only one person at *ZONE* had played, and became a team frenzy of hacking excitement. Go and get hacking straight away. **PCZ**

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PCZONE

REVIEWS

Our verdict on the latest PC games

Monkey do

SHOOTING AT INANIMATE objects may be the world's most pointless activity, but we've all done it. And so, upon settling down to a nice chilled-out night in front of the box, I found myself instead yelling obscenities at the TV.

The culprit was an episode of *CSI: Miami* which featured a bunch of teenagers robbing banks, shooting policemen and attempting to rape female bystanders. Not for the cash, but because they were re-enacting a fictitious game entitled *Urban Hell Raisers* (a blatant *GTA* rip-off), and trying to garner the highest score.

It was ridiculous stuff, but there are some portions of society that really view gamers like this. How long will they stigmatise us just because of what we choose to do with our spare time?

And what would society make of me, a games reviewer? According to these views, I should practically be a one-woman killing machine. But as of yet, I'm yet to go on a mass-murder rampage. Although if my train is late just one more time this week, I might not be able to help myself... ;)

Suzy Wallace

Suzy Wallace, reviews editor

Must Buys!

PC ZONE Classics are our highest award, with only the best games deemed worthy of honour. These are our personal top tips for sheer gaming excellence...



HL2: Ep One Company Of Heroes Oblivion



GAME OF THE MONTH

62

BATTLEFIELD 2142

Is the future bright for the mechs generation of online shooters?

The PC ZONE Awards



CLASSIC (90%+)
The best games ever. If you're lucky enough to see one, stop and buy it.



RECOMMENDED (75-89%)
Pretty, pretty, pretty. Any game that turns ZONE's head is worthy of your love.



DUMP (0-19%)
Don't shirk your duty - it's the only responsible thing to do to a game like this.

AND THE REST



ONLINE ONLY
Don't have an Internet connection? Then you're wasting your time. Move along please.



EXPANSION PACK
See this and you're going to have to own the original to play the expansion. We know - life's not fair.



ON THE DVD
Good news! Check out the cover DVD for a playable demo or movie.

The PC Class System

Not all games are created equal, so how do you know if your PC's up to the job? Using real science, we've graded your system from 1-5. Match it with the icon on each review to see if your PC will play the game. We review all games on a variety of systems, including our top-spec, very desirable Xworks X6a-64.

	1	2	3	4	5
CPU	1.2GHz	1.8GHz	2.4GHz	3.0GHz	3.8GHz
RAM	64MB	256MB	512MB	1GB	2GB
Video	32MB	64MB	128MB	256MB	512MB

ALSO REVIEWED

- 68 THE GUILD 2
- 68 BLACK BUCCANEER
- 70 DARK MESSIAH: MIGHT & MAGIC
- 76 DEFCON
- 80 EL MATADOR
- 82 JOINT TASK FORCE
- 85 NBA LIVE 07
- 85 TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 07
- 86 JUST CAUSE
- 90 PARAWORLD
- 91 THE ANT BULLY
- 94 GOTHIC 3
- 98 FIFA 07
- 99 NHL 07
- 99 MADDEN NFL 07
- 100 FACES OF WAR
- 104 INDIE ZONE

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PCZONE SWEARS...

- To only review code signed off by the publishers AND the developers
- To give you our honest opinion. We're gamers. We love games. And we hate bad ones. Just like you
- To tell you if a company refuses to send a game to us before it's on sale. There's always a reason
- To hang up on companies who say that 79% isn't a good score. What do they know?
- To listen to you if you think we've got something wrong. Email us at yourshout@pczone.co.uk



Good luck claiming your insurance on this.

BATTLEFIELD 2142

War has changed, but will *Steve Hogarty* find the future perfect?

DEVELOPER EA/DICE
PUBLISHER EA
WEBSITE
battlefield2142.ea.com
ETA Oct 20
PRICE £34.99



AT A GLANCE...

The semi-sequel to *Battlefield 2*, *BF2142* propels the online shooter into the future, with mechs, airships, and an ace new game mode.

System requirements

4

HOW IT STACKS

BATTLEFIELD 2 94%

BATTLEFIELD 2142 86%

JOINT OPERATIONS 83%

HAVING POURED EVERY recent waking hour into *Battlefield 2142* (and some hours in which I was only partially conscious), I can safely say that while it's not an enormous leap for the series, this futuristic sequel is by no means a standalone mod. Calling it *Battlefield 2.5* would be a mite too harsh, whereas calling it part of a new generation of online shooters would be an accolade not entirely deserved. You could say it's doing to *Battlefield 2* what *BF: Vietnam* did to *Battlefield 1942*, though this game works far better than DICE's previous attempt to extend the life of a *Battlefield* engine. Instead, *BF2142* is a brilliant rethink of the *Battlefield* armoury, a refreshing new way of playing a classic game, with one undeniably fantastic new game mode.

INTERFACE THE FACTS

Let's start with exactly what happens when you double-click the *Battlefield 2142* desktop shortcut you've probably placed, like a minesweeper flag, on the bit of your Jessica Alba wallpaper where you guessed her nipple would be, because it's right after booting up *Battlefield 2142* that the first

changes become apparent. The server list which once refused to acknowledge any of your requests while it took an age to update has been replaced by a silky-smooth and far more usable server list. Logging in is painless, and the time between clicking a menu button and something happening on-screen has been reduced from days to fractions of a second. It's taken 136 years, but finally it all just works.

How bizarre is it that we have to start a review of this game by saying that the menu system *actually works*? It still takes a moment to load the menu screen when you hit the escape key during a game, but we'll let the developers off on that count.

The year is two thousand, one hundred and forty-two, and things have changed since you first flew a Spitfire into a control point on Wake Island 200 years ago. The world is being overrun with terrorist glaciers as a new ice age dawns. Two factions, the EU and the Pan Asian Coalition, both of which are distinctly not American (not a sign of the US anywhere in fact), fight for control of the only unfrozen bits of planet left.

Somewhere along the timeline, scientists have made some very important decisions

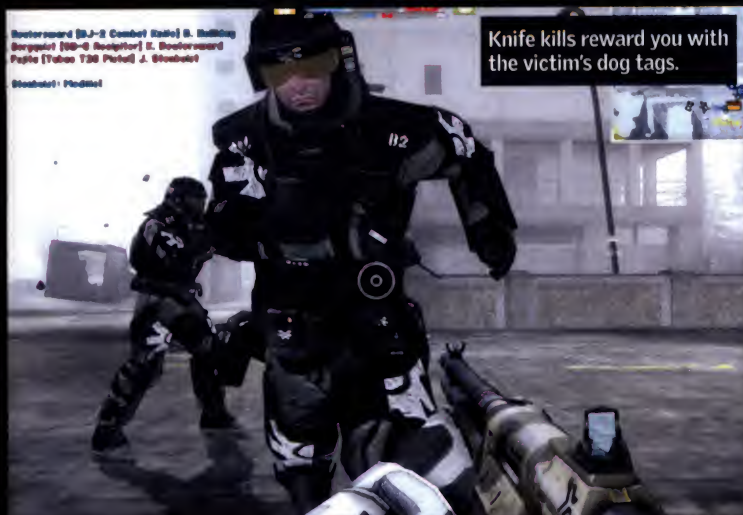
– namely that some tanks should be allowed to hover, planes should have fewer wings and be more hover-y, and absolutely massive airships should hover high above the battlefields. (Can you spot the theme?)

Other decisions made by these scientists suggest they've been watching lots of great sci-fi movies. So, guns are bulkier and give off bluish muzzle flashes, while Recon soldiers can use cloaking systems to turn invisible – but only for a while, and only as long as they hold down a button. Also, giant bipedal tanks dominate the playing field. Welcome to the future, soldier.

MECHS GEN

Mechs, walkers, great stomping metal bastards, whatever you want to call them: driving one is empowering, like riding a





Knife kills reward you with the victim's dog tags.



Bah - I'll be late for the battle now.

giant mechanical T-Rex. The disturbing sight of an Engineer running between your legs to launch something, anything, at your crotch (yes, that's actually your weak spot), or to stick bombs to your precious legs is something that no other vehicle in the series has provided. Long-range combat with tanks is another danger, and particular attention needs to be paid to the skies, as a well-aimed missile attack from above will put an end to your 20ft adventures. Your secondary weapon, however, is a payload of anti-aircraft EMP missiles, so justice flies in two directions where walkers are concerned.

Walkers are easily the most impressive and devastating force against both ground and air units in *Battlefield 2142*. At close range they're damn near unstoppable, requiring more than a simple tow-rope around the legs to put them out of commission. Engineers carry the sort of anti-vehicle weaponry a walker pilot should fear (we've settled on calling them walkers, after the crisps), but first the massive future-tanks need to be disabled with EMP grenades, EMP mines, EMP rockets, or generally something with EMP at the start of it. That's



You could say that it's doing to *Battlefield 2* what *BF: Vietnam* did to *Battlefield 1942*, though this game works far better



Strikes now come from orbit - how futuristic!





In the future, a simple crosshair won't suffice.

an ElectroMagnetic Pulse by the way, the sort that knocks out all electronic systems within a certain radius – you may remember them from such plot devices as the bit in *The Matrix* where they kill the squid bots.

In *BF2142* however, an EMP puts a walker, or indeed any vehicle, to sleep for a few vital seconds – time enough for a disciplined squad to blast off both its legs with C4, or for an Engineer to make that all-important rocket attack.

The futuristic setting has allowed DICE to better integrate their rock, paper, scissors approach towards vehicle design too. The PAC army (whose logo bears a striking resemblance to that of a leading sports clothing brand) has a highly manoeuvrable hover tank that can strafe but cannot rotate its turret, and APCs are no longer treated as B-grade tanks.



The British accents are refreshingly bearable.

Instead, they play a huge role in allowing troops to launch themselves massive distances from the on-board launch pods, either up to the massive Titan motherships in Titan mode, or just across the map in Conquest mode. Each army has their own version of the APC, as well as a light fighter gunship for aerial attacks, a troop transport aircraft, a tank, an all-terrain buggy for moving quickly around the map, and the infamous walker.

The fine balance between soldier combat and vehicle combat has been tuned too, meaning you feel slightly less useless when you're not sitting inside a machine.

REMEMBER THE TITANS

The collaborative efforts required of a squad to take down a walker highlights one of *Battlefield 2142*'s new staples, or rather an old staple, rebuffed and made distractingly shiny: teamplay. Whereas lone wolves could survive admirably in *Battlefield 2*, such unco-ordinated

endeavours won't lead to as many victory screens as before. In fact, without some degree of order-following, victory in Titan mode becomes almost impossible.

Titan mode is the biggest departure from the *Battlefield* formula, and definitely the most exciting and refreshing feature of *Battlefield 2142*. It can be played on five of the game's ten maps (all ten maps are playable in standard Conquest mode) and puts each team in possession of an airship 'the size of a football field', to use the National Geographic scale of measurement.

This skyborne behemoth is your base of operations. Not only can you spawn there, but it's also where both your fighter aircraft and your transport aircraft are spawned. There are powerful, player-controlled gun turrets that launch barrages of something dangerous and explosive at nearby ground units, making the Titan itself a staggeringly destructive weapon.

Touching down on terra firma is achieved in a variety of ways too. You

BUYBUYBUYBUYBUY!

Money money money! Rargh feed us money!



Is this someone's idea of a joke? It's pretty vuckan weak if it is.

Battlefield 2142 will be the first game in which EA are implementing their new dynamic advertising scheme, something which means lower game prices for us customers. OH WAIT, NO! It actually means more cash for EA, exactly the same game prices for customers, and contemporary, indestructible, suspension-of-disbelief-destroying advertising on billboards throughout the game. As one EA representative (who may or may not have been wearing a jewel-encrusted crown) put it, the customers will benefit in the long run because the money EA consumes from lucrative advertising deals will be used for future EA sequels and booster packs FOR US TO BUY. All of this decided no doubt by men in boardrooms in the sky who haven't played a videogame since they accidentally fell on a joystick attached to a *Pac-Man* arcade cabinet and struggled for a moment to free themselves from it. Thanks capitalism!



Aaaarrrgh! (Sorry, for a moment there we had a flashback to *Breed*.)

Class of your own

BF2142's class system is the best of any online shooter around. The seven classes of old have been perfectly compressed into these four, which can be customised endlessly using unlockable items



RECON: This is where the sniper rifles went. One of the unlockables is the well-balanced cloaking system, which makes for some great sneak attacks.



ASSAULT: The Medic class has been melded with the Assault class, so the medipack now comes as standard. The defibrillator is one of the first unlocks.



ENGINEER: This class holds the heavy weapons, and can also unlock the extremely handy EMP mines, which really screw up the PAC hovertanks.



SUPPORT: These guys not only resupply team-mates with ammo, but can unlock deployable auto-turrets – crucial for defending in Titan mode.

Crates: not at all futuristic.



either fly, if somebody else hasn't already nicked the aircraft, or you can hop into a launch pod. These man-sized pods blast you from the side of the Titan, allowing you to land anywhere within a certain radius of it. You even get to control the pod slightly as you arc through the air – hell, if you're good enough you can land right on an enemy soldier! It's the new defib kill.

Once on the ground, there are five missile silos to capture and direct at the enemy Titan. These work almost exactly like standard control point flags from Conquest mode – the more of you at a missile silo, the quicker you disarm it and redirect it. Move too far away from the silo and you lose your connection to it, forcing you to start again.

Things which might make you want to move away from the silo include but are not limited to: orbital strikes raining hell from the heavens, a really big tank and angry men with guns. The old tactic of hovering right above a control point to capture it isn't advised either, as that's generally the path missiles are intending to take. Once these missile silos have destroyed the enemy Titan's shield, you're free to board it.

BOARDING SCHOOL

OK, still with us? This is where Titan mode becomes interesting. After either hopping into a pod and launching across from your

own Titan to the enemy's (if it's close enough – the team commander can move their Titan slowly about the map), or launching yourself upwards from an APC far below (the most fun way by far), or just landing on the rear deck with your aircraft like a wasp to a piece of jam whose shields you've just destroyed, you're ready to start bringing down the beast.

This is the part of the Titan game mode which everybody thought would be a horrible experience reminiscent of *PlanetSide*'s repetitive interiors. Anybody who's run about the inside of the aircraft carrier in *Battlefield 2* will know that previously, the engine handled indoor areas as well as a coma victim handles juggling balls. It was bland, glitchy, and if you ever had the misfortune of coming across an enemy in there, you'd both just nod knowingly before taking your differences outside. Inside the guts of the Titan is a different story, however. It's polished, detailed and seamless. It's no more or less enjoyable than fighting outside, but it's not broken. Thank god, it's actually not broken.

Combat inside the Titan is fast-paced and lethal. Soldiers of the Support class can deploy turrets to defend corridors, anti-personnel mines reign supreme, and snipers draw the short straw as close-quarters combat becomes the norm. Once you've destroyed four strategically placed control panels,



Land on the shielded front deck and you're vaporised.



Capturing silos attracts all kinds of attention...

By far the most exciting feature of *Battlefield 2142*, Titan mode puts each team in possession of an airship 'the size of a football field'

neutralized control point Roadblock
ambills) B Tingle

rry, Champ
Throwing frag!
Throwing frag!

Can you spot the culprit?



the Titan rolls over (metaphorically that is) and exposes its reactor core – then it's pretty much just a matter of shooting at that or loading it with explosives until it (eventually) blows up. Perhaps the cleverer game designers went home early that day.

Finally, as the Titan literally begins to explode around you, you've got a few moments to escape with your life. The quickest way down is a mad dash back to the rear deck and a sky dive over the edge as the crippled Titan puts on an impressive fireworks display behind you. And yes, it really is as much fun as you're imagining it is.

GET TOGETHER

This brings us back to the issue of teamplay. Titan mode encourages it to the extreme; so much so that it's an awkward experience if you're not in a squad, and worse if you don't have a decent commander. It's like spinning plates – you need a team on the ground keeping those missile silos pointed at the enemy Titan, you need a team in your own Titan to



EMP blasts use the old blue lightning effect from *Weird Science*.

With all the customising options, squad points, medals and rankings, *Battlefield 2142*'s character system is almost in the realm of 'RPG-lite'

defend it from invading forces, and finally you need a team on the enemy Titan to take it down. It's a triangle of responsibility, and if it's not equilateral it begins to form a horrible isosceles triangle, or even worse, a scalene triangle of irresponsibility (a phrase I'm officially coining).

Titan is designed exclusively for team players who are prepared to do what they're told. It's not like DICE are oblivious to this either. In fact, they've bolstered the incentives to play in a squad by introducing squad points, which are awarded for dutifully following your leader's orders. These points count towards unlockables for squad leaders, including such delights as deployable spawn points and auto-sentry turrets. Plus, of course, when you're in a squad, enemies that your team-mates can see show up on your HUD – exactly like *Advanced Warfighter's* CrossCom system. (Except DICE have called it NetBat. Ubisoft must feel very flattered.)

Outside of squad upgrades, *Battlefield 2142* boasts even more persistent player features than its predecessor. Unlocks and

ranks were and still are a massively popular feature of *Battlefield 2*, and *Battlefield 2142* doesn't shy away from giving players something to work for. The classes have been reduced from seven to four, but now offer the option of customising your kit to your own preference (see 'Class Of Your Own', page 65). As you play, you earn points which can be used to buy new items for certain classes, with two separate branches of unlocks leading to two different weapons. Coupled with the ranking system, and the ability to win medals and awards for fulfilling certain



Inside the reactor core – just like *Star Trek*!

A map in the face

Is worth two in the bush



This bit's actually really scary.

Battlefield 2142's ten maps range from the now entirely frozen cities of Berlin, Belgrade and Minsk to the receding waterlines of the Suez Canal in Africa. Standard *Battlefield* rules apply, in that each map comes in different sizes depending on how many people are playing. Particularly noteworthy are the buildings of the Fall Of Berlin map, which you can enter to access various balconies and corridors – a haven for snipers. The Sidi Power Plant map features a capture point on a central bridge which becomes a priority for anybody who actually wants to win. And Belgrade has hills up which walkers can attempt to climb, before falling over backwards in a hilarious manner. Five of these maps can be played in the superb Titan mode.

Flying has been made far more n00b-friendly.



quotas (and now pins for achievements within a round), these features put *Battlefield 2142*'s character system almost in the realm of 'RPG-lite'. OK, so it's hardly going to start attracting the *World Of Warcraft* players, but it's nudging the genre in exactly the right direction.

Battlefield 2142 isn't the sequel many were hoping for. If you prefer the solitude of modern warfare, you might prefer to stick with the old version; but the gaming elite, the clan members and team players of the Internet should usher in the new with enthusiasm. It's certainly not going to supersede the increasingly popular *Battlefield 2*, as most of its merits are merely held over from its predecessor, but nevertheless it's a brilliant evolution of one of the greatest online shooters ever made. And it's got giant walking tanks. **PC4**

PCZONE

Graphics Improved slightly over *Battlefield 2*
Sound One of the tunes is very *Star Wars*
Multiplayer Of course. Single-player with bots too

- ✓ Titan mode is superb
- ✓ DICE have nailed the style
- ✓ Great new class system
- ✗ Doesn't move things on a whole lot from *Battlefield 2*
- ✗ Relentlessly team-focused

86

Titanic



THE GUILD 2

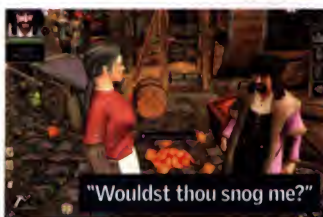
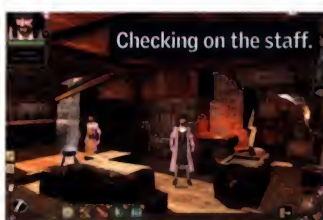
Regression therapy for ex-chemists

DEVELOPER 4Head
PUBLISHER JoWood
WEBSITE www.theguild2.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £34.99

System requirements 2

GAMES SET IN Nottingham without Robin Hood are rare. The shit castle (really just a big house) and the wonderland that is Situls Gift Shop (specialising in dry-ice dragon fountains and cock-shaped pasta) – all these things are ignored in gaming's gamut. Thanks to chronology, they remain ignored in *The Guild 2*, a medieval life-sim set in the 15th century.

The Guild 2 is the same thoughtful, entertaining and mostly thrills-free type of affair as its predecessor, *Europa 1400*. If anything, it suffers from being too similar in scope, and it's probably best suited to the curious, thinky gamer who either missed out on the first game or really, really loved it. A lot of people did – you're not alone. The goals are still free-form in a rather tramlined sort of way – set up a business, get on the council, give presents to some peasant until they let you get on top. Then put the freeload pregnant tart to work in the shop. Rinse and repeat for two centuries, then you should rule

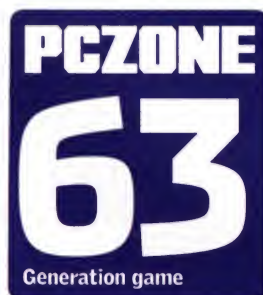


the Midlands. You can be an alchemist, scholar or robber, too, if you get off on being mental, clever or a git.

It's ambitious and quirky, and it does offer some reward if you've got the patience. But it looks fairly dated, and is only really for the devotee of life-sim games, feeling as it does like a semi-precious curiosity.

It's well translated, though. When the Tom Baker-esque narrator leers, "Someone has insulted your delicate nose", it's genuinely funny. And when I gave the command for my lovebirds to finally get sack-nasty, the random phrase he chose to blurt out was: "Stop pretending you're tired". I really did raise a sordid eyebrow at the semi-consensual feel to the whole affair. Good work!

Jon Blyth



BLACK BUCCANEER

That be a voodoo curse, matey...

DEVELOPER Widescreen Games
PUBLISHER Atari
WEBSITE www.black-buccaneer.com/en
ETA Out now
PRICE £34.99

System requirements 2

BLACK BUCCANEER IS my redemption. Too often, in my short time at *ZONE*, I've been made to feel like a curmudgeonly old grump. While reviewing children's games, I've been forced to complain that children – though smaller and less drunk than us adults – aren't little boxes of stupidity that we can decorate with dross.

So I'm indebted to this title for proving I still have a shred of childish pleasure left in me. A third-person acrobatic platformer, *Black Buccaneer* is a homage to early *Tomb Raider*, with some *Prince Of Persia*, a whisper of *Devil May Cry* in the combat, and the voodoo flair of the N64's *Shadow Man*. Call me a sucker for theatrical voodoo, but I like a religion that lets you walk around hell, then pop back to open a chest or two. And if you're going to cross pirates with anything,

voodoo is ten times better than ninjas or zombies.

Yes, it's pretty basic from the game-design point of view; there's a fair bit of crate-pushing, you'll find your way blocked by shrubs just before learning how to burn shrubs, and there's a quite staggering focus on killing very similar-looking primates. Also, it's definitely too expensive for what it is. These are all valid complaints from the jaded, unhappy adults we've all become.

But at least you're never lost. Both the island of *Buccaneer* and the missions are neatly parcelled up into manageable chunks. And progress is so steady and the controls so forgiving that it's plain, untaxing fun to explore what's on offer.

Perhaps you want to get someone else into videogames. Perhaps you've just played *Faces Of War* and need to unfurrow your brow. *Black Buccaneer* is gaming Botox, and I do somehow mean that as a sincere compliment.

Jon Blyth





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Easy games #5:
slapsies with a cyclops.



Bill Oddie never saw
the likes of this.



DARK MESSIAH: MIGHT & MAGIC



Jon Blyth gets Ashan-faced with *Might & Magic's* Source-powered adventure

DEVELOPER Arkane Studios
PUBLISHER Ubisoft
WEBSITE
www.darkmessiahgame.com
ETA October 27
PRICE £34.99



AT A GLANCE...

Arkane Studios adopt *Half-Life 2's* splendid Source engine for the latest hack-and-slash outing in the *Might & Magic* universe.

System requirements

3

HOW IT STACKS

OBLIVION 95%

DARK MESSIAH 84%

ARX FATALIS 83%

NOT SO LONG ago, The Kingdom of Ashan seemed to be suffering from an incurable blight. It wasn't a centuries-old curse from before the Seventh Dragon. Nor was it a ruddy great troll sitting on a volcano. To an outsider, *Might & Magic* seemed to be a self-contained niche, catering to its devotees and completely ignoring the rest of the world. The last few RPG games have been as thrilling as a wafer, and whereas the *Heroes* series has produced some good strategy games, you'd have to have some demented humping disease to suggest they were sexy.

With the RPG side of the franchise in crisis, *Dark Messiah* seems like Ubisoft's justification for shelling out over a million dollars for the franchise in the first place. Give the devotees a stepping stone between Ashan and acceptability, and lasso a pile of new players in with some gutsy action and geysers of arterial spray.

There are even sassy women scrapping over you, although one of them is inside you and could well be evil, and the other one has cracking boobs but... Well, she could be evil too. As for the guy who guides you through your tutorial, if that's not the voice of an evil bastard then I'm a gymnast.

And it works. Once you're out of the training dungeon, you get to see just how

beautiful the game is. If you're not one to question orcs living in Dutch huts right next to massive spider's nests – and if you are, stop it – there's some breathtaking vistas to be had. The Source engine hasn't been given much chance to astound people outside of *Half-Life 2*, but *Dark Messiah* is testimony that two years on, Valve's baby is still capable of slapping your stupid face and making you watch. In comparison, the pre-rendered cut-scenes are like being struck down briefly with astigmatism.

SHANTIRI RACE

As luck would have it, after your training mission, your mentor reckons you're ready for a proper quest, and asks you to take the Shantiri Crystal to some wizard in a town somewhere. The reasons are as forgettably fantastic as any excuse for a 15-hour scrap. Suffice it to say he thinks you'll need help, so he summons a jealous sex-obsessed woman who jumps into your head and acts as a saucy narrator. (And more, later on, but no spoilers here, sir.) A short monorail – sorry, horse – ride later, and the action begins in true *HL2* style, running around buildings while glimpsing the stuff you're going to have to fight later.

And the fighting is where it's at. If you played the demo, you'll have felt that excellent sense of 'connect' that's so rarely

even attempted with first-person fantasy games, but was hinted at with *Oblivion*. The swordplay works brilliantly; you can click-hack away if you like, but beating the goblins with a powered-up slash is both economical of finger and gives you that sense of competence that stops you having flappy palpitations. It also powers up your adrenaline bar, which boosts your next charged attack or spell to 'mostly lethal'.

There's a good collection of spells and bows (including *Thief's* rope bow for the platforming elements) and you can plump for stealth if that's your sneaky bag. Stealth would seem a shame, though. With all the fun of fighting, it seems like a waste to avoid it, and the opportunities for effective sneaking aren't too regular anyway. It's often more effective to run screaming through a spider's lair than tiptoe. (Plus it amuses me to think of two bored spiders half-turning around from tending to their queen and saying: "Did you see that? A big man just went running through.")

Developing all these powers without being forced to choose a class or a race keeps the focus happily on sticking your sword into an orc's face. There's a very small role-playing element, but Arkane have chosen to limit stats to the absolute minimum. The three small skill trees – combat, magic and other stuff – are



He's not worthy...



They only want to hug your face.

Boss Hog

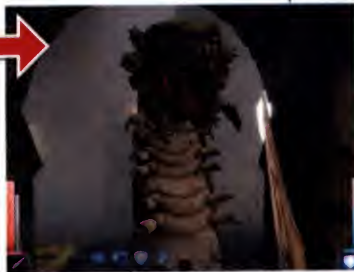
A whistle-stop tour of some of Ashan's bigger critters



Bosses aren't necessarily the gruelling battles they threaten to be. This winged beastie is a piece of piss, once Leanna tells you what to do.



As for the wee Cyclops fella, there are a couple of ways to sock it more simply to the one-eyed swine. Just look up (and down) for clues.



As for him, well. He's just a massive worm – he don't know no better. His mam liked the gin, see? It's a bleedin' shame, so it is.

Won't be invited back here again.

purchased with skill points earned at set moments in the game. You get the vast majority of points simply by getting by, not by meticulously killing everything.

Clearly, I wanted to be brutally powered-up by the end of the game. But despite the modest size of my skill trees, they still looked positively autumnal by the last level. Hence the replay value, if I can bear to give up my skills and start again.

AND A PRETTY FACE

The reason character development has been 'streamlined' is that *DM* is all about fighting. *Oblivion* and the *Thief* games (and *Severance*, if you remember that far back) have attempted to introduce engaging swordplay with varying degrees of success, but Arkane have dropped their trousers and gone for it. So, are there any problems? Well, a few. It'd be great if you could hot-key an aggressive spell so you don't have to sheathe your weapon. You can quick-cast Cure (the one essential spell in the game), but we play games to feel like gods, and it's annoyingly mortal to have to put down your sword to cast a spell.

That sense of 'connect' I mentioned is wonderful when it happens. But it doesn't, not always. Some weapons – and I'm



The tree that nobody loved.



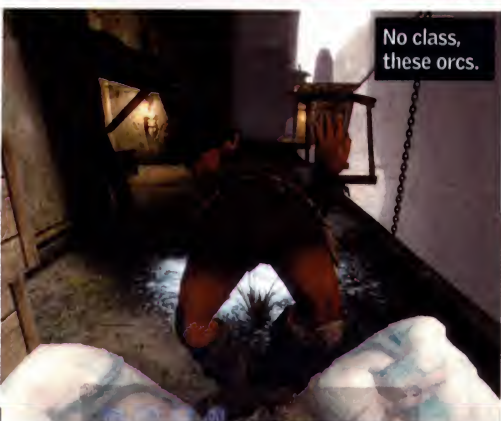
We play games to feel like gods, and it's annoyingly mortal to have to put down your sword to cast a spell

Boxes out

When titillation occurs...



She's just noticed me staring.



No class, these orcs.

Sexing up a game isn't just about the gameplay, and if there's anything *Sin: Episodes* has taught us, it's that the Source engine can do tits near water. *Dark Messiah* isn't as blatant as soggy ladies, but it has its moments. And my lucky shot of an orc slipping on my magically cast ice patch reveals a surprising insight into my foe's gender.



You can't accuse it of looking bad.



Bright HDR lights, big citadel.

Don't lose your he... Oh, never mind.

looking mainly at you, the staff – feel ridiculously cumbersome. Eight-foot poles are supposed to be unwieldy, I understand that. But half the time you can't even tell if you're attacking someone, or just doing a decorative twirl like a big-headed girl.

Also, using any melee weapon against the game's spiders results in that frustrating shrill of steel against stone, even when the graphics imply a hit. Arkane might well argue that any sensible warrior would use ranged magic attacks against a creature with a fast, poisonous bite. I would reply that I like my lightning daggers, so shut up, you're not my mum.

Happily, the sense of elite excellence in all things returned when I adrenalin-fireballed some spiders, and the whole lot went up at once. Screw connect – I'm a Pyromancer now, thank you very much.

The equipment you can fill your inventory with is (and I've chosen this word after deleting a couple of others) healthy, both in size and scope. You'll pick up new stuff regularly enough to keep your interest, even if you don't spend too much

time looking for the secret loot (which is usually potions anyway). You'll find elemental weapons, spell scrolls for people who've completely neglected their magic skills, and a boiled-down dress-up section of armour and rings. No +3 Boots of Walking – just rings and armour.

The inventory list is also healthy by virtue of not being too anal. In the absence of stats for strength, dexterity, fertility and deliciousness, the weapon and armour prerequisites, if any, are tied into your skill tree. It's another incentive to follow certain paths, even if they do tend to guide you towards combat.

Arkane's other big draw is the amount of conveniently placed environmental weaponry. There's so much going on in terms of things tied up, precarious shelves and spiky-looking stuff just waiting to take a tumble, that you could be forgiven for neglecting your spellcraft and swordsmanship altogether, and just kicking everyone off bridges. After all, it doesn't matter how you kill them, you'll still get the skill points.





It's been waiting centuries to do that.



For *Oblivion* fans and role-playing nuts it might seem wrong that throwing oil at people lets you spend points on, say, walking stealthily, but it frees you up to slog on as you see fit. For *Dark Messiah* – which is as far from *Oblivion* as you could hope to be – it's the right choice.

BLOOD SATISFACTION

Seasoned players and pedants will complain about the transparency of the level design and the flagging up of the environmental features. Goblins storing barrels on really precarious shelves too high for them to reach must provide endless stand-up material for the orcs. And you do feel a touch patronised – when you're still getting reminded on Level 4 that you can kick people down stairs and on to spike beds, you want to scream "I KNOW!" into your headphones. It's understandable that developers want to show people how clever their game is, but it robs you of the satisfaction of working things out yourself.

The opportunities for this satisfaction are there, though. It was an eye-opener when the guy I was trying to kick onto a spike bed turned around and threw the spikes back at me. And one of the game's most satisfying moments – for me at least – involved being thrashed repeatedly by a group of orcs, before finding an oil jar, smashing it on the floor and fireballing it when they got close. Better results than I could have hoped – three of the bastards aflame. Aflame, I tells you!



The multiplayer brings all of this to a perplexing set-to. The role-playing element is perversely and rather substantially upped. Here's where you'll find the classes, the levelling-up – even the skills trees are more developed. The developers, Kuju (the MP mode was developed separately) have developed the Crusade mode to supplement the standard deathmatches. If you win one map, the next map is one step closer to the other team's stronghold. Get to their stronghold and win, and the Internet gives you a big invisible medal, and so on. It's a good way of investing a little more interest in a souped-up point-capture game, even if – given relatively equal sides – you're likely to spend most of your time on the central map.

The balance of classes (archer, warrior, mage, priestess, assassin) is good, but not quite as refined as the benchmark standard of *Team Fortress*. The archers feel too powerful, and when I joined a game as a Level 1 mage, I was roundly and immediately twatted by a Level 5 undead warrior who clearly had no qualms about



It may be an 'optional' boss, but it's worth a go...

The ABCs of RPG

The all-action approach to armour class and inventories



This wee page is where all your character development goes on. It's your inventory, your spells list, your skill trees, your armour and rings page, the lot. It's all very economical. But if you love experience points, page after page of stats, the tech trees from *Civ IV*, and that crinkling sound of parchment when you bring up a menu, then you might like to keep open a book full of graphs and formulae by your keyboard when you're playing *Dark Messiah*. You big spod.

bullying the new boy. My hopes for one-on-one duels using my single-player skills were dashed; the sword combat has been simplified to accommodate everything else going on. It's not world-changing at the moment, but there's enough of interest to keep me coming back for a nose around.

AND FINALLY...

Dark Messiah is graphically excellent, and a brave attempt to bring convincing hack-and-slash action into the first-person. The character development adds some limited but welcome RPG elements, and there's a constant feeling of rewarding progression and plot advancement. If the game suffers, it's from over-explanation, the occasional lapse in the combat, and the repetitive nature of the environmental weaponry. But I was kept entertained all the way through, and I've never felt so directly responsible for chopping off a goblin's arm. And that has to be a good thing. **PC**

PCZONE

Graphics Utterly lovely
Sound Fantasy fayre
Multiplayer 32-player crusades

- ✓ Gorgeous
- ✓ Unique and innovative swordplay
- ✓ Plot, script, acting – all good
- ✓ It's decapitational
- ✗ Occasionally patronising
- ✗ Environmental weapons not varied enough

84

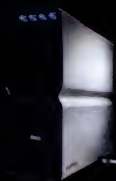
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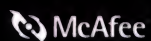
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DEFCON

Intelligent but an underachiever, *Jon Blyth* is a classic case for recruitment by the Soviets

DEVELOPER Introversion

PUBLISHER Steam /

Introversion

WEBSITE

www.everyone-dies.com

ETA Out now

PRICE \$15 (£8, Steam), £10 (Download), £12.50 (Boxed)

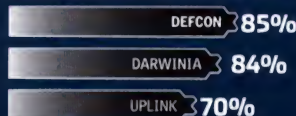


AT A GLANCE...

A fast-paced multiplayer game of inhuman annihilation taking anywhere from 15 minutes to a full working day.

System requirements

HOW IT STACKS



EVERYONE HAS a personal vision of what a nuclear war would be like. Your common or garden peasant – you and me – imagines four minutes of frantic apologies and humping before the skin is hosed from our skeletons with an atomic sandblast. Paranoid millionaires will finally get to use their undersea bunkers and observe the carnage on a wall of monitors with an ex-military robot who's been reprogrammed to function as a masseuse. And finally, there's the button-pressers. The only people who'll be really safe from this war are the people who'll start it; the people so divorced from what it means to be decent and humane that they're physically able to pick up the phone and order something as devastating as a nuclear strike.

Stop looking so morally superior. You know who you'd rather be, and it's not the humping dead guy. And it's not the millionaire either, because you know that robot's going to revert to its original programming when you spill your pink gin onto its pleasure circuit. You want to be in control.

It feels like the right time for a nuclear shit-scare revival. South Korea are getting nukes. Iran have just built a heavy water plant. Holland's acting funny too, and Mr Patterson's spending far too long in his shed at the weekends. *DEFCON* rekindles the beautifully crafted fears of the '80s and brings the childhood tingles flooding back. Games like *Crysis* may well make people scream with delight, but *DEFCON* has a beautiful, efficient minimalism that hits you on a deeper level; you couldn't have made this game any other way. *DEFCON* looks absolutely right.

KILL ME NOW

The game fills a void that I'd almost forgotten was there; a short, exciting, self-

contained game. Not round after indefinite round of *Counter-Strike*. A game that isn't non-committal, with people dipping in, not doing anything for two minutes, then leaving. Something that relies on approachable simplicity but rewards thought and cool-headedness. As a beginner, you won't feel instantly daunted, but you will get mopped up by the seasoned tacticians.

But don't lose heart. The tide of war can be completely reversed – as it was between myself and that scumbag Robinson – with a couple of missiles slipping through my bloody stupid defences and hitting a well-populated town. Perversely, you score nothing for destroying military targets. That just makes your main job – killing civilians – easier. Two points for a million dead sound fair to you? Cool.

HUP HUP HEADS UP

The evocative *DEFCON* countdown defines the level of hostilities and what you're allowed to do. It's uncomfortably true to the real DEFCON countdown, too. At DEFCON 5 – peacetime – you'll be occupied with getting your silos, air bases and radars on the ground. Remember, it's peacetime,



Office Mode

"Is that spreadsheet ready yet, Patterson?"



It's been a while since games have incorporated a boss key, but then again it's been a while since you could fit a game on a 64MB flash drive. Simply tap Escape twice and your plans for destruction disappears into your system tray, to be replaced with that PowerPoint clip-art library you were looking at. This is ideal for Office Mode, which gives you longer to react to threats, and is designed to be spread over a working day. Well, at least they're being honest – DEFCON is perfect for wiping out national productivity. Now excuse me, it looks like Hogarty's launched a nuke.



so send your subs on a peaceful day-trip to your neighbours' coastlines. Maybe put knotted hankies on their heads. At DEFCON 4 – increased intelligence – you start getting feedback from your radars, giving you the opportunity to place your units in a marginally more informed fashion.

DEFCON 3 is a rare state in real life, but here it arrives all too quickly. If you haven't got all your units in place, then you're in trouble. Because now, it's action o'clock, and your naval units know it; unless you've formed a crafty alliance, your carriers start spitting crap at each other. It's also time to launch scout planes to check out neighbouring countries. Find the bastards'

DEFCON is a clever blend of inspired simplicity and deceptive profundity

silos and wreck their radars, so when the time comes, your nukes will slip through like wet jelly through a squash racquet.

DEFCON 2 – continued and heightened conflict – is just a stepping stone to the only section of the game where you can score points. Global thermonuclear war. Jesus, it's been a while since I've heard those words together. Within minutes, the fully zoomed-out world map will become a chaos of trajectories, radiation and matter-of-fact info-bursts like 'London Hit: 10.3 Million Dead'. The fact it's all moving so

slowly doesn't make it any less frantic.

Am I sounding excited? Because I am. DEFCON is such a clever blend of inspired simplicity and deceptive profundity, presented in such a powerfully evocative way, that I want to get Introversion to decorate my house and invent the rest of my life for me. At under £8 through Steam, and only £10 if downloaded direct from Introversion, there's simply no excuse for anyone not to own, play and become hopelessly seduced by this absurdly gorgeous game. **PCZ**

PCZONE

Graphics Perfectly minimal
Sound Subdued, ignorable
Multiplayer Single-player possible but not advised

- ✓ Gorgeous
- ✓ Simple yet deep
- ✓ Nuclear war is cool again
- ✓ Stop asking questions, it's quite obviously great
- ✗ Unvaried gameplay

85

And I didn't even mention *WarGames*

ALL I HAVE IN THIS WORLD
IS MY BALLS AND MY WORD.

AND I DON'T BREAK
'EM FOR NO ONE.



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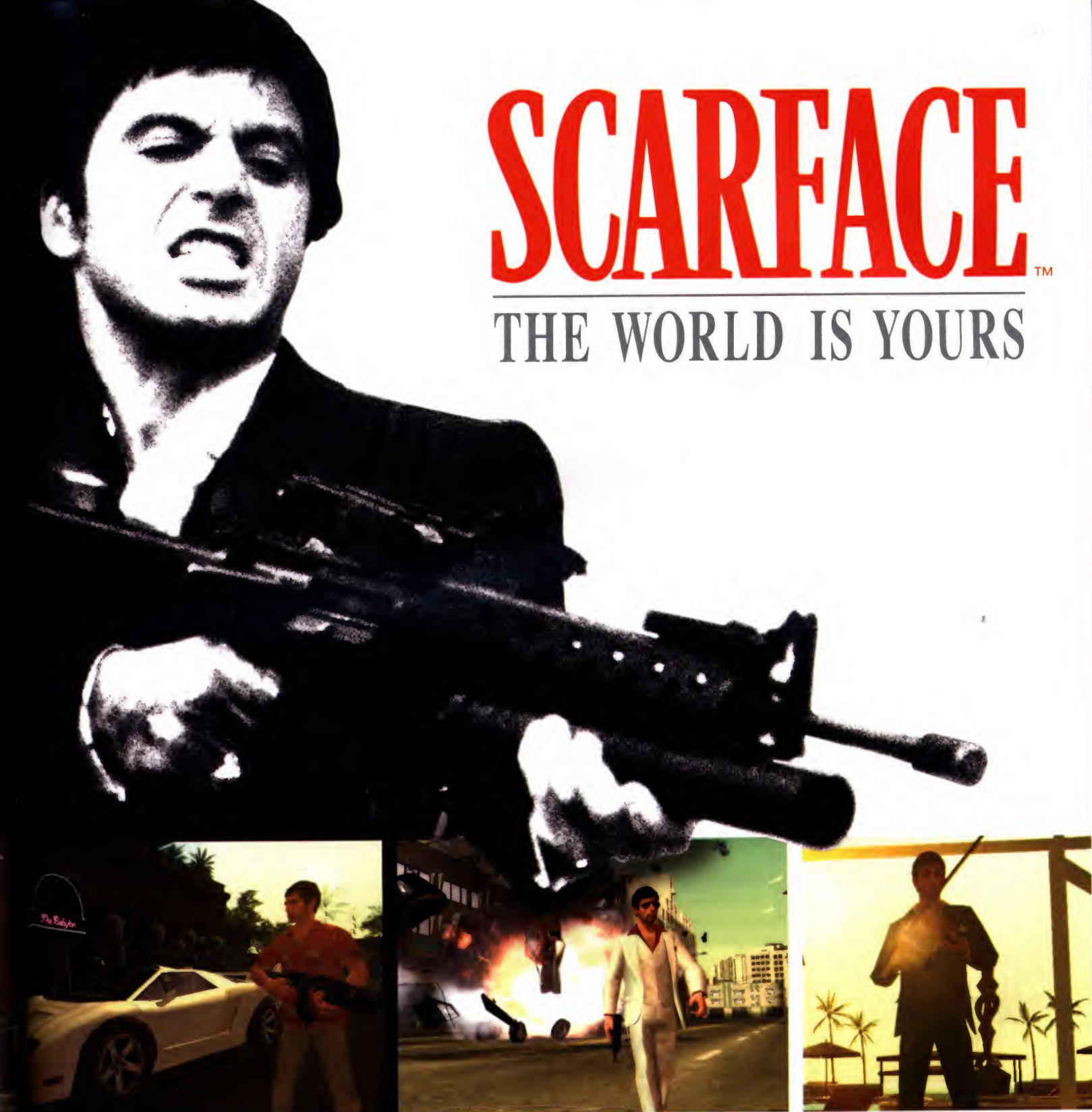
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Helicopters feature regularly.

EL MATADOR

Steve Hogarty grabs the bull(shit) by the horns

DEVELOPER
Plastic Reality Technology
PUBLISHER Ascaron
WEBSITE
www.elmatador.net
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99

THERE'S A KNACK to jumping on bandwagons. The first thing to remember is, of course, to jump on a good one. *El Matador* does this perfectly well, with bullet-time as its wagon of choice. You also have to jump while the bandwagon is hot, or at the very least, still there. *El Matador* does this not so well, missing the wagon by a good few years and tumbling downwards into a sea of mediocrity while *Max Payne* plays a slide whistle condescendingly and trundles off into the sunset.

It's bad enough that *El Matador* is far too late with its sideways-jumping action, but it fails to deliver any of the coolness or satisfaction of Remedy's classic. Everything about it feels floaty and disconnected, slowing down time makes you feel really sluggish and inaccurate, and you can forget about hitting anything while diving as your crosshair is jerked about rudely like a pogo-stick at a sexy bikini photoshoot.

The weapons are nondescript, ranging from 'unusable single pistol' to 'ineffective shotgun' to 'machine gun you'll always want to use but are never given ammo

for'. The AI of your team-mates consists of a command to run into you and push you into the line of fire, and the AI of enemies consists of shooting you all too easily while occasionally ducking behind things.

THIS IS ASS

It looks fine on the surface – there's no faulting the game's aesthetics. Lists of graphical features as long as your arm make *El Matador* a picturesque game at times, especially on some of the later levels (the game arbitrarily leaps between jungles, docklands and urban centres). It doesn't even begin to approach the expansive environments of *Far Cry* or *Just Cause* however, something which is painfully prevalent throughout because of the game's linear design. Having mapped my screenshot key to 'E', looking through all of the screenshots I'd taken presented me with image after image of various locked doors – like some horrible and inescapable Homebase catalogue.

It really does come close to being a decent game, but unfortunately its foibles set it on the wrong side of the tipping point of unbearability. Which isn't even a word, but who cares? **PCZ**

AT A GLANCE...

Max Payne meets *Far Cry* meets a massive pile of shite.

System requirements

3

HOW IT STACKS

MAX PAYNE 2 93%

FAR CRY 93%

EL MATADOR 43%

PCZONE

Graphics Great!
Sound Horrible!
Multiplayer No!

- ✓ It looks great!
- ✗ It sounds horrible!
- ✗ Voice-acting's horrible!
- ✗ Script's horrible!
- ✗ AI's horrible!

43

El Crapador, more like

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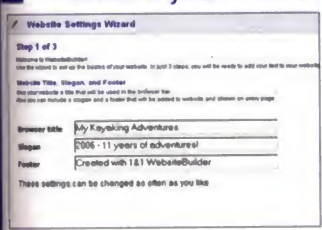
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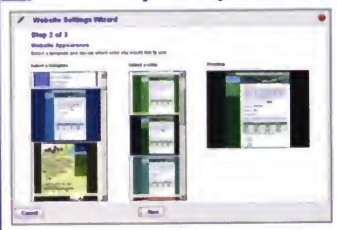


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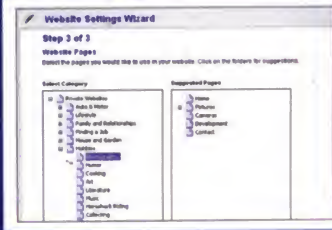
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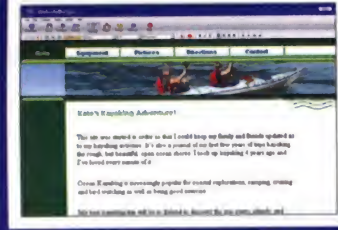
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JOINT TASK FORCE



Suzy Wallace joins the forces on the front line...

DEVELOPER
Mithis Entertainment
PUBLISHER VU Games
WEBSITE
www.jointtaskforce.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99

IRAQ, AFGHANISTAN, THE Balkans, Somalia – the locations visited in *Joint Task Force* read like a top ten listing of where not to go on holiday. But while you wouldn't want to arrive at any of them with your suntan lotion and a towel slung over your arm, these recent theatres of conflict provide the perfect backdrop for the game.

Each area is host to a number of missions, and although the obligatory 'bomb the crap out of the enemy' objective is never too far away, the other tasks are widely varied, from accompanying civilian folk to safety to hunting down warlords. As you complete each selected mission, the map expands, offering up yet more challenges.

The levels themselves are expansive and beautifully outfitted, with the environments ranging from busy shipyards to the mean, dusty streets of Mogadishu. Unfortunately, all of this is rather hampered by the restricted view area, which is limited to a few meagre degrees of tilt and comes combined with a painfully slow scrolling speed. The game is undeniably beautiful, though, with glorious hi-res units, vehicles and buildings exploding in brilliant fashion and new

forces arriving via transport helicopter and rappelling down.

HOSTILE FORCES

JTF dispenses with the base-building and resource-collecting RTS norms, instead putting a heavy emphasis on combat with its customisable troops, but it never quite feels as natural or intuitive as *Company Of Heroes*. The fighting is reasonably fast-paced, but with the odd path-finding issue and some units insisting on doing their own thing, the sense of never quite being in full control is always present.

The title's unique twist is its use of the media. When a news crew is in the area, performing media-friendly activities boosts your spending money, while standing idly by as civilians are massacred reduces it, which gives a real moral incentive to the game. However, the feature is underused, and thus much of *JTF* is pretty standard RTS fare that occasionally teeters on the brink of dullness.

With the superior *Company Of Heroes* looming over the proceedings, *JTF*'s lovely graphics, underused media twist and modern settings mask a solid but perhaps rather uninspired take on the genre. **PCZ**



PCZONE

Graphics War's never looked so good
Sound Adequate battle sounds, humorous soldier comments
Multiplayer Domination, Deathmatch and Cooperative modes

- ✓ Looks gorgeous
- ✓ Topical settings
- ✓ Media twist adds morality
- ✗ Media twist isn't used enough
- ✗ Restricted view and slow scrolling

73

Keeping the peace

AT A GLANCE...

Gorgeous war-torn RTS tours the world's most recent conflict spots and puts an emphasis on the media.

System requirements

4

HOW IT STACKS

COMPANY OF HEROES 93%

ACT OF WAR 84%

JOINT TASK FORCE 73%

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PC

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NBA LIVE 07

I wish I was a little bit taller...

DEVELOPER EA Sports
PUBLISHER EA
WEBSITE www.easports.com/nbalive07/
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99

System requirements 2

WE HAVE TO admit it – we're guilty of owning the odd novelty LA Lakers jersey from our trips to la-la-land, but you don't have to be a hardened baller to see that things haven't changed much in EA's latest basketball update, which is instantly familiar if you've played last year's edition – or even a couple of years previous to that.

Still, there's a solid basketball sim here and fast-paced multiplayer bouts are enjoyable even if you're basketball-ignorant. In terms of actual changes – obligatory graphical updates excluded (there seems to be some fancy new sweat technology going on) – *NBA 07* owners can look out for updated Freestyle Superstar Skills that can now be switched on-the-fly. The Dynasty mode has also improved, letting you manage your



team to balling stardom, along with fancy ESPN integration, touted in most of the EA Sports titles this year.

While a lot of work has obviously been put into improving upon last year's *NBA Live*, we can't help but feel that EA might be over-saturating things by piling 'Moral Meters' and 'Superstar Skills' on top of the core ball gameplay. Whatever happened to just throwing some balls into hoops, looking good in a vest-top and being far too tall for most other things in life? It's still one of the best basketball sims available, just don't expect much beyond recycled goods.

Andy Robinson



TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 07

Tiger, Tiger, burning bright?

DEVELOPER EA Sports
PUBLISHER EA
WEBSITE www.easports.com/tigerwoods07
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99

System requirements 2

THE WORLD'S MOST successful golfer he may be, but even the unstoppable Mr Woods isn't averse to the EA dollar. Having lent his name – and face – to the series since the last century, this year's version again joins the pantheon of EA Sports titles that clog up the letterboxes of games magazines around this time of year.

So what's new in this year's title? Not a lot, to be honest. While the console versions offer a slew of new (albeit mainly superficial) features, the PC would appear to have been overlooked. What you get is a vague mish-mash of previous games, seemingly slung together to fulfil a contractual obligation.

The only tangible addition is that of the Team Tour, whereby you select a four-ball of golfers and go head-to-

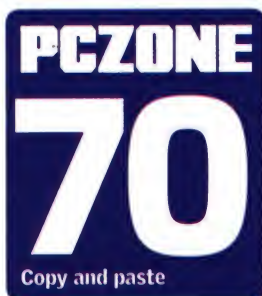


head against other quartets. What this actually means is that you spend a lot of time watching the other players, or indeed hitting the Escape key until it's your turn.

In its defence, the courses are reasonably authentic and the licensed golfers are mainly recognisable. The trademark mouse-based swing mechanism works well enough, but is far too easy, with even the shakiest of gamers able to regularly score 100%. Aiming is an imprecise affair, and you generally end up taking the default option, simply slugging away until you're on the tee.

The Game Face gimmick is old hat now, but if you've got the time and inclination you can create a mildly deformed version of yourself and set about becoming a professional golfer. Ultimately though, it's a lacklustre affair that we've seen many times before. Sound familiar?

Steve Hill





Sunsets: always good for quiet contemplation.



Stunt-cam usually means you've done something wrong.



Hmm, my new graphics card loves this.



"Argh! Not the Cuban heel!"

JUST CAUSE



Steve O'Hagan is press-ganged into covert action on a Central American island. "Is it just cause I is black ops?" he asks

DEVELOPER
Avalanche Studios
PUBLISHER Eidos
WEBSITE

www.justcausegame.com

ETA Out now

PRICE £29.99

AT A GLANCE...

Free-roaming, carjacking, jet-flying, speedboat-racing, bazooka-firing, bomb-planting, cocaine-smuggling, revolution-fomenting GTA clone.

System requirements

4

HOW IT STACKS

GTA: VICE CITY 95%

MAFIA 92%

JUST CAUSE 82%

THINGS ARE NOT looking so bright on the Central American island of San Esperito. A corrupt dictator is developing illicit WMDs. Guerrillas roam the countryside, fighting running battles with the neo-Nazi army. Drug cartels control whole towns and villages, drinking, whoremongering and generally leading enviable lives on their marching-powder profits. And to make matters worse, the Americans are about to send in one of their agents to effect a one-man regime change. San Esperito may have thought it had seen its fair share of violence, but wait till it sees what the Agency can do.

Your first involvement as special agent Rico Rodriguez sees you being tossed out of a plane at 5,000ft. Once mild panic has receded, you work out how to deploy your parachute and come floating down to be briefed by your Agency contacts. From here, in true GTA fashion, where you go is completely up to you. This war-torn, white-sanded, jungle-covered island is your oyster.

Go anywhere, take any mission, steal any vehicle: GTA, you have been robbed again, but this time at least the muggers have had the decency to spend their takings wisely.

BIG IS BEAUTIFUL

San Esperito is a huge, sprawling land of opportunity. You haven't seen a gameworld this big before, at least not one where there are no load times and missions are to be found at every village, every T-junction and every jungle clearing. Do the Agency's dirty work, help the guerrillas liberate villages or assist the drug cartels in their turf wars. It's more dangerous than Rochdale town centre at throw-out time, with policemen battling drug barons and fighting freedom fighters. But while San Esperito may be a brutal cesspit of wanton violence, it sure is a beautiful one.

The lush, shimmering greenery, the lingering sun coating everything in gold – just cruising the highway is an eyeful. But it's those staggering vistas from 10,000ft

that really bring a tear to the eye. And not only is there not a load time in sight, but the horizons have the draw distance of a flight simulator. It's such an appealing sight it makes you want to volunteer to swallow condoms full of crack, just to be allowed to join a Colombian drug cartel.

MAN PLUS

If there's scant attention paid to the laws of the land, there's even less given to the laws of physics, as it turns out Rico is something of a bionic man. In one mission, he found himself careering off a cliff on a dirt bike. He managed to let go of the bike mid-air, at which point he assumed that psychotic-looking head-first skydiving position. A quick key bash convinced him to flip open a parachute, with which he then glided down to the road in the valley below. Seeing as he was just returning from dynamiting a police station, his 'wanted' level was still pretty high, so no sooner had he heeled someone out of their Buick than

[F] DEPLOY PARACHUTE
[E] USE VEHICLE
[SPACE] JUMP OFF VEHICLE

"Stop! I forgot
my mobile!"

[E] EXIT VEHICLE
[MOUSE BUTTON 1] FIRE WEAPON
[M] WHEEL UP) SWITCH WEAPON

Go to Mendoza's destroyer
and get on board

"Anyone got any
marshmallows?"

The game is so visually appealing it makes you want to volunteer to swallow condoms full of crack

a squad of police vans turned up, together with a rocket-spewing helicopter.

One major road accident and at least 12 fatalities later, his Buick was belching fire. Another keystroke got him standing on the bonnet, and another saw him leap 150ft into the air to grab hold of the tail of the bombarding helicopter. Executing a rather unfeasible but majestic move, he then delicately swung into the cockpit and pushed out the hapless pilot, and a minute down the line, having worked out how to fire the rockets, the remaining police vans were burning. I swung the mouse round to watch the glorious sunset as we flew home.

WHERE'S MY CHOPPER?

Just Cause is like a bunch of rudimentary arcade games bolted together. *Ridge Racer* one second, *Silent Scope* the next, then a bit of *Crazy Taxi* followed by *Air Combat*. Everything is easy – hijacking a car, jumping from one speeding car to the next, latching onto a helicopter with a grappling hook,

then parachuting out once hit by a SAM. Sometimes too easy, as you can fall 100ft and not take a scratch, or ram a car into a tree at 150mph without the paintwork even flaking. A little more simulator-like sophistication in the driving models wouldn't have gone amiss.

With a super-abundance of high-powered civilian and military hardware strewn carelessly around the place with the keys still in the ignition, San Esperito must resemble what Jeremy Clarkson dreams of as heaven. It's one big unruly racetrack. You can hot-wire overpowered sports cars and hurtle them off clifftops. You can drive tanks through jungle, villages and oncoming traffic. You can get under the canopy of a supersonic fighter jet and strafe the countryside indiscriminately. And for the first hour or so of playing, of course that's exactly what you'll do.

At which point you'll be well and truly lost up some hillside dirt track fist-fighting some farmers whose





Paint the town red

Liberating villages is a recurring theme of the side-missions – and gains you prestige, equipment and safe houses



The job revolves around destroying a series of roadblocks. Meet the local guerrilla to get things started.



Attack on-foot and you'd better bring some high explosives – not just for the roadblocks, but the enemy air cover.



Alternatively, you can bring your own transport. Anti-personnel rockets from four yards usually do the trick.



Once you've penetrated the outer defences, just polish off the fat-ass, cigar-chomping comandante.



Bang goes something else.



"I come here for the views."



Not just violence – there's also sex!

Don't take baby food on board.

cart you just totalled. Where the hell am I? What am I supposed to do next? These are questions that will blight your first hours in San Esperito. It's only after microscopic scrutiny that the interface – especially the mapping system – reveals its secrets.

URGENT INSURGENT

Once you've wrestled with the mini-map and kick-started your insurgency career, the next hiccup turns out to be the mission balancing. It swiftly becomes apparent that the side-missions – liberating towns and running errands – are as hard and often harder than the main missions for the Agency. Consequently, you find yourself ploughing through the game ignoring the annoyingly difficult unnecessary stuff, meaning that, despite the impressive size, the game is over sooner than you know it. And when you hit one of those bastard-

hard missions that take eight goes to get right, you'll feel like you're commuting to work from some faraway respawn position.

According to the popular spiel, *Just Cause* combines the open-plan game structure and madcap carjacking of *GTA: Vice City* with the intense action and exotic locales of *Far Cry*. Well, it kind of does this in its own enjoyably shambolic way. In building an arena so vast, the developers have baked themselves a mighty big cookie to take a bite from, so yes, the result is a little rough around the edges. The driving model isn't exactly precision-tuned; cut-scenes take place at the opposite time of day to when you trigger them; approaching helicopters sound like horseflies. But in injecting regime change with such sheer raggedy-ass size and balls-out bluster, the developers have joined Rico Rodriguez in pulling off something of a coup. **PCZ**

PCZONE

Graphics Watch 'em all day
Sound Nice music, but
dicey sound
Multiplayer No

- ✓ Ultra-free-roaming
- ✓ Masses of vehicles
- ✓ Doesn't get boring
- ✓ Stunning real-time world
- ✗ It's so sprawling, gameplay can be a little sloppy

82

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PARAWORLD

Steve O'Hagan encounters dinosaurs and various bushes

DEVELOPER SEK
PUBLISHER Deep Silver
WEBSITE
www.paraworld.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £34.99

AT A GLANCE...

Humans and dinosaurs co-exist in this old-school RTS that owes much to *Age Of Empires* and *Jurassic Park*.

System requirements

3

HOW IT STACKS

THE LORD OF THE RINGS:
THE BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH 91%

AGE OF MYTHOLOGY 90%

PARAWORLD 71%

WHILE HOMO SAPIENS was still learning to daub pictures on cave walls using his own faeces, Godzilla Jurassicus had already been extinct for several million years. There has been much speculation about how, had both species coincided, man and dinosaur may have learned to pool their efforts in the areas of resource-gathering and real-time strategy. Rejoice, then, as *Paraworld* answers all our questions on such an inter-species link-up.

Paraworld is set in a land where Vikings rub shoulders with velociraptors, and Zeppelins float above herds of Mesozoic grazers. Flung into the midst of this era-muddled realm are a bunch of groovy modern-day scientists, led by Anthony Cole, an ordinary Joe wearing a jacket from TK Maxx to prove it.

And what a land it is he finds himself in. You don't often get to see these kinds of vistas in the isometric, polygon-lacking world of the RTS. Yet here's an environment

as lush as Kew Gardens, as teeming with life as London Zoo, and as utterly pleasing to the eye as one of those postcards of Switzerland when it's summer.

With a decent graphics card under the bonnet, we're talking 'every blade of grass' levels of detail here. We're talking night turning to day in front of your very eyes, the weather changing and the seas lapping gently against white, crystal sands. For a moment you're tempted to sit back and watch the herbivores graze peacefully, before the irrepressible urge to brutally slaughter them for food takes over. Yes, to do anything, first you need to collect that unholy trinity of the fantasy/history RTS: food, wood and stone.

There really ought to be a law against having to collect berries and logs in RTS games. How many times do we have to do it? Fruit-picking may have been quirky back in the *Age of Empires*, but industrial-scale blackcurrant-harvesting is hardly the stuff of gaming dreams. With its stubborn

insistence on old-school resource collection and base-building, *Paraworld*, for all its exotic trappings, is at its core a deeply conservative RTS that probably voted for Michael Howard in the last election and thinks that 3D is a bad idea, but one it will grudgingly accommodate.

BACK FOR MAW

But you know what? Despite the aching familiarity, the game keeps you playing. Perhaps the ease with which you can sink into this exotic world is its strong point. Or perhaps it's the slick presentation that makes everything so easy on the eye. Or perhaps it's the surprising, incident-filled levels, which, while they often boil down to you building a big army to go and smash the enemy base, manage to throw some curve-ball sub-quests into the mix.

You know the main disappointment, though? It's the dinosaurs. You want gargantuan prehistoric killers locked in savage, bloodthirsty, barbaric tooth-and-

Headhunting

Fight for the right to level-up



Every time you splat an enemy, you collect some skulls. As well as being the kind of resource a man can feel proud of collecting (unlike elderberries), skulls can also be spent on upgrading troops – not between missions, but in the middle of them. All your units are permanently displayed as icons on the left of your screen in a pyramid structure, the highest level at the top, the lowest at the bottom. Choosing who to level-up and when becomes a vital battle skill, and lends *ParaWorld* some much-needed tactical subtlety.



There ought to be a law against having to collect berries and logs

claw battles. Bone-crunching, visceral carnage that kicks you square in the plums with its white-knuckle, 10ft-lizard-based gore.

But what you get is something a lot tamer. Huge, hulking behemoths, instead of flinging corpses this way and that, tend to nuzzle their foes until their health bar turns red and they keel over. Instead of stomping buildings into Ikea flat-packs, they stand next to them, waving their mighty necks or tails gently until the building collapses in a jumble of flames. These dinosaurs may be beautifully drawn and animated, but there's just not enough blood and thunder pouring out of them to generate that shaking-glass *Jurassic Park* 'Oh my God, here comes the T-Rex' moment. They sure got the dandelions right, but not quite the dinosaurs. **PC4**

PCZONE

Graphics Better than *Jurassic Park*. Almost
Sound Horrendous cheesy voice-overs spoil the broth somewhat
Multiplayer Yes, up to eight players

- ✓ Jaw-dropping environment
- ✓ Clever levelling-up system
- ✓ Levels you just can't predict
- ✗ Please don't make us pick any more berries
- ✗ Please don't make us chop any more wood
- ✗ Please don't make us mine any more stone

71

Big, old and beautiful



THE ANT BULLY

PC gaming for ant-brains

DEVELOPER A2M
PUBLISHER Midway
WEBSITE theantbully-game.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £19.99

System requirements **2**



WHO WOULD BULLY an ant? Me for one, having been subjected to this interminable quest to help the pathetic little creatures protect their rancid, teeming nest.

Like the movie, the game centres on Lucas, a boy who's been miniaturised to the size of the average red ant. Coping well psychologically, Lucas befriends his mandibled companions and becomes an accepted member of the nest. How this qualifies as children's entertainment and not the stuff of some black, twisted nightmare is beyond me.

Also in line with the movie, your task here is to learn some handy ant skills, ranging from wood beetle-killing to pupae collection, and to scuttle up that greasy pole to become a major player in ant society.

But oh god, the drab, repetitive environments! The irritating tittle-tattle of your ant chums! The soul-sapping



repetitiveness! This is console-ported 3D action-adventure platforming at its most unimaginative and ill-executed. The controls are faintly cumbersome, the camera a wild, mindless beast, the visuals dour, the combat tedious.

Life's already a constant struggle against bloody spiders and wasps – give us some escapism in our videogames, will you? Worse still are the torturously familiar mission goals: find some of these, kill some of those, hooray! If you're really desperate for insect-based gaming, stick to burning ants with your magnifying glass.

Steve O'Hagan



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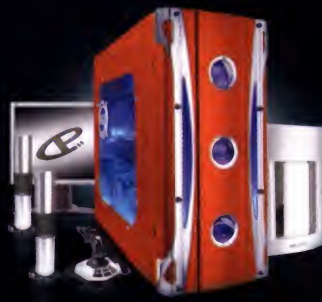
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Orcs: taking our jobs and our women.

Folk nearby will pitch in to help.

That's a big map.



GOTHIC 3



Sam Kiildsen ventures into an RPG that's as open-ended as a wizard's sleeve...

DEVELOPER Piranha Bytes
PUBLISHER JoWood
WEBSITE www.gothic3.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99

AT A GLANCE...

Choose your own adventure in an *Oblivion*-style RPG: fight monsters, travel the vast world, liberate your land from oppressors, or join them.

System requirements

4

HOW IT STACKS

THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION 95%

GOTHIC 3 85%

GOTHIC 2 80%

UNLESS YOU'RE A German or a role-playing-game fanatic, the chances are you don't know very much about the *Gothic* series. Huge in the land of sauerkraut and sausages (we're talking Hasselhoff-esque levels of popularity here), the first two *Gothic* instalments also won praise for being among the first RPGs to successfully create a convincing world. Yep, years before Bethesda released *Oblivion*, a tiny German developer had produced an open-ended game where the inhabitants ate, slept, went to work, shot the breeze with their mates and, on occasion, strummed away at a lute (well, we've all done it).

Gothic 3 follows the same basic blueprint as its predecessors. You play the same bearded, nameless hero, again arriving in a new world and essentially left to do whatever you like. Whereas the previous games were set on the island of Khorinis, you've now made your way to the mainland, Myrtana. And it's in a huge mess: orcs have conquered the country, besieging the king in his fortress city and subjugating the rest of the population, forcing them either

into slavery or into the arenas to fight as gladiators. Other humans have either joined the orcs as mercenaries or fled to the forests to join the rebels. Thanks in part to this unrest, the bordering nations of Varrant and Nordmar are also in flux.

OPEN SEASON

Dropped into this chabs, you're free to approach the situation however you see fit. You can simply wander through the gigantic world (it's around four times bigger than *Gothic 2*), hunting creatures and getting your hands dirty with various side quests, or you can sink your teeth straight into the main plotline by siding with the rebels, the orcs or both.

Unlike most open-ended RPGs, *Gothic 3* presents no obvious good and evil paths. The orcs, for instance, aren't just a bunch of savage killers, but a proud martial race with a fierce sense of duty and honour; the mercenaries that serve them are simply trying to make the best of a bad situation; and the rebels are striving to throw a hostile occupying force out of their homeland, but are also plagued by greed and infighting.



Most cities have a gladiatorial arena.



Nice apron.

Gothic 3 has no obvious good and evil paths: the orcs, for instance, aren't just a bunch of savage killers



Goblins make easy but irritating prey.

These factions, along with the others in the game, will offer you quests and other work, rewarding your successes with gold, experience and increasing respect. Clear out the nest of bandits troubling the village of Cape Dun and you'll earn favour with the orcs; continue doing jobs for them, or prove your prowess in the arena (orcs respect a tough guy), and eventually they'll grant you an audience with their leader. Even if you've decided to side with the rebels and chuck the orcs out of town, this comes in handy: you can now get close enough to the orc boss to slip a dagger between his ribs.

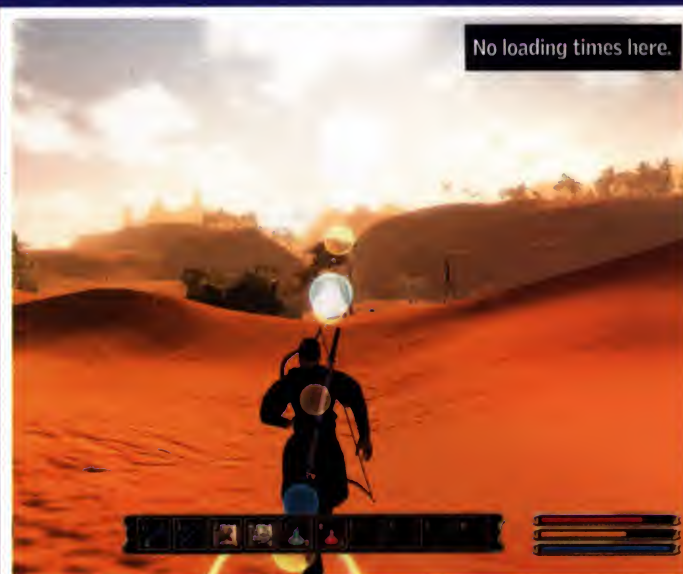
Eventually – around two-thirds of the way through the game, which should take at least 50 hours to complete – you'll have to make a final choice and join one of the main factions (see 'Faction stations', p97), but until then you're free to work for whoever you choose. It's a nice system, but nothing that'll surprise *Gothic* fans.

EYE CANDY

The gameworld is a huge, beautiful thing; it's not quite as eye-caressingly gorgeous as *Oblivion*'s Cyrodiil, but it's not far off,

Get a load of this

Moving from one end of the map to the other? Seamless...



No loading times here.

Gothic 3 must be one of the biggest games ever to have no loading screens at all. OK, so there's a loading screen when you start each game or hit the quick-load button after being killed by an irate wolf FOR THE TENTH FRIGGING TIME, but you could literally trudge from one end of the map to the other and not see a single 'Please wait'. And before someone bellows 'Oblivion had that!', *Gothic 3* doesn't even have a loading screen when you walk into a building. Impressive.



"I like what you've done with the place."



Some of the views are breathtaking.

particularly if you happen to possess the kind of processing monster that'll allow you to turn all the graphics settings up to 11. It's certainly more varied in its environments than *Cyrodill*: grasslands, forests, cliffs, mountains and deserts all put in an appearance – and that's just the stuff above ground. Naturally, there are cities, towns and camps dotted around, and plenty of inhabitants, some friendly, some... Not so much.

Which brings us to combat – never one of the *Gothic* series' strong points. Taking place in real-time and involving only the mouse and the movement keys, it's something that requires a period of adjustment – during which you'll find yourself laid low by any enemy that doesn't resemble an oversized chicken.

There have been a few tweaks, but the system remains similar to that used in the previous games. You now block by holding down the right button, and can use jabs, swings and devastating power attacks to break through your opponent's guard. The idea behind it is clearly to add a tactical, fencing-like element to the

combat, but much of the time you find yourself simply hammering the fast attack to put your target under a withering hail of weak blows. If you don't time them right, you get smacked up faster than you can say, "Please don't kill me." An improvement it may be, but for us, it's still not quite there – though it gets better if you decide to develop your melee skills (more on that in a moment).

One *Gothic* staple that remains is the 'killing blow' mechanic. When you beat a human or orc, they don't die outright. As they lie helpless on the ground, you have the option of either allowing them to live or delivering a final thrust that'll finish them off. While the latter is always tempting, it's worth remembering that murder is a crime in the game: if someone sees you killing someone, you're going to get in trouble.

CLASSLESS SOCIETY

The character-development system has undergone a rather substantial revamp. Some things are still the same: you gain experience by



Where da women at?

Myrtana's got a bit too much testosterone for our liking...



Gothic 3's huge gameworld is filled with all manner of people (and orcs), but there are two notable omissions: women and children. The latter is understandable, given that you can kill anyone, but the dearth of females is a bit strange. During our travels we only met two women with proper dialogue, and both of these were dancing girls. Alas, the rest of the world's female population are generic types with nothing to say.

Thankfully, the developers have avoided compounding this oversight by making most of the women whores, which they did in *Gothic 2*. The game's bizarre FMV sex scene was among that year's gaming low points – but happily there's nothing quite so disturbing here.

It's like being on holiday. Sort of.



The physics engine leads to some funny deaths.



killing things, eventually accruing enough to level-up. Each time you do so, you're handed ten 'learning points' to spend on improving your attributes or on learning new skills. With no character classes, you can pretty much mould your bearded, nameless avatar (the ponytail's gone now, thankfully) into anything you like. Fancy turning him into a bow-wielding hunter? Easily done. How about a sneaking rogue? Or a badass mage? No problemo. You can mix and match these abilities, but it's wise to concentrate on one or two things only, unless you want to end up as the living embodiment of the phrase 'jack of all trades, master of none'.

New to *Gothic 3* are handy skills such as 'Murder' (stab enemies from behind to kill them instantly) and 'Fighting with Two Swords' (yeah, you can probably work this one out yourself), which basically give you even more freedom in the way you

Certain foes are impossible to beat till you get further in the game – there's a reason for you to level-up

Faction stations

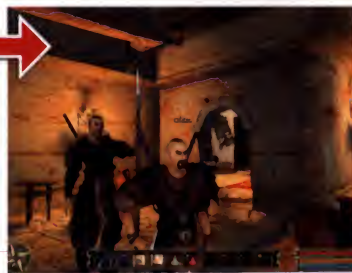
Eventually, you'll have to choose one of three sides. Here's a quick rundown...



The orcs currently ruling Myrtana do allow their human subjects freedom of religion. But they also enslave them and force them to dig for artefacts.



The rebels are waging a guerrilla war against the orcs. Hiding out in caves, forests and such, they plan for the day when they will reclaim their land.



The Hashishin are folk from the desert land of Varrant. They are currently allied with the orcs, but it's clear they have their own agenda.



develop your character. You'll still be a funny-looking bloke with a goatee, mind.

There's no level cap, so you can keep developing skills and abilities all the way through the game, and, unlike in *Oblivion*, enemies and other characters don't level-up with you, meaning you're not going to slay a dragon and then get iced by one of the aforementioned oversized chickens on your way home.

Instead, each type of enemy has been given a minimum and maximum level, and where they are when you meet them depends on whereabouts in this range they are. This means that certain foes are going to be impossible to beat till you get further in the game, while others will soon become mere fodder for your sword edge. A wise decision by the developers, in our opinion: it ensures there's a reason for you to level-up (so you can get to certain places and complete certain missions) and makes the

world more believable. In *Oblivion*, bandits end up toting equipment worth many thousands of gold coins, which doesn't make sense – that doesn't happen here.

JOHNNY CRASH

If it all sounds a little too good to be true, that's because it is: while there's nothing particularly wrong with the game concept, the execution could be much, much better. We can accept small quirks and bugs, such as poor path-finding and bodies floating 4ft above the ground, with a bit of a chuckle. We didn't find the frequent crashes to desktop quite so charming, and we hope JoWood has a patch in the works to sort this out.

Technical issues aside, though, *Gothic 3* is definitely something any self-respecting RPG-lover will want to get his or her teeth into. The game manages to blend just the right amounts of combat, NPC interaction,

character development, exploration and epic, save-the-world storytelling into the sort of potion that your typical beardie will gulp down with wild-eyed abandon. It'll keep said beardie occupied for days (and that's just the first play-through), so it's pretty good value for money as well. To top it off, it's got bags of eye candy if you've got a beefy PC.

On the downside, the danger of spreading your shill-base too widely and unforgiving combat will make it a bit too challenging (nay, frustrating), as you can't 'do an *Oblivion*' and simply explore the entire world at level one. That said, it's still the most accessible and the best-produced of all the *Gothic* games (yep, the other two could be even more frustrating and prone to crashes), and deserves to win an audience outside of Germans and RPG fanatics. With the technical hitches ironed out, it just might get it. **PC**

PCZONE

Graphics Epic, beautiful landscapes
Sound Sweeping orchestral score. OKish voices
Multiplayer Nope

- ✓ Gorgeous visuals
- ✓ Open-ended gameplay
- ✓ Impressive world
- ✓ Replayability
- ✗ Frustratingly tough combat
- ✗ Somewhat buggy

85

RPGrrreat!



They love each other.



9 Blundell

Evans

Even the penalties are passable.



Good god – the goalie's a giant!



Pick that one out!



Keepers make more acrobatic saves.

FIFA 07

We go over to *Steve Hill* for the latest score

DEVELOPER EA Sports
PUBLISHER EA
WEBSITE
www.fifa07.ea.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99



AT A GLANCE...

The umpteenth version of *FIFA* surprises everyone by actually being playable. We've probably played this more than all the others combined.

System requirements

3

HOW IT STACKS

PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 5 93%

FIFA 07 84%

2006 FIFA WORLD CUP 78%

IF YOU WANT to defeat your enemy, sing his song. It may be an Aboriginal proverb, and they probably didn't have football-based computer games in mind, but the sentiment is relevant. As the rivalry between *FIFA* and *Pro Evolution Soccer* escalates, they're in real danger of turning into each other. With early dabbles on *PES6* hinting at a faster-paced, more arcade-like game, *FIFA 07* drops on the floor and reveals itself to be an intelligent, realistic, absorbing simulation of football.

What this means is that we can't simply wheel out the usual hollow plaudits about the excellent presentation being let down by simplistic gameplay. What you have this year is the usual top-drawer production values, all of which complement a genuinely excellent game of football.

So how have they done that? To put it bluntly, by copying *PES*: give the people

what they want. From the default panned-out camera view to the *PES* controls – as they're known internally at EA, where everyone plays *PES* – the nods towards its arch-rival are clearly evident.

BALL BAG

Arguably the major advance however, is in the ball physics – something we've been banging on about for years. Amazingly, they've finally listened. Whereas previous games have been akin to kicking a bag of magnetic shit around the pitch, in *07* the ball behaves largely as you'd expect a leather sphere full of air to behave. So instead of a set of predictable moves, you actually get a real, organic, live game of football, with the ball bouncing off players' arses, getting hoofed off the goal-line and being scrambled round the penalty area while you buck wildly on your sofa.

While a few flicks and trick remain, much of the superfluous crap such as

sending players on runs has been cut out, and success is largely down to playing decent football. As such, this is arguably the first *FIFA* game that makes you care about the result, with the huge variety of goals being greeted by jubilant celebrations. 'This Is The Season,' claims EA. For once, we have to agree. **PCZ**

PCZONE

Graphics Excellent
Sound Superb commentary
Multiplayer Yes

- ✓ Proper ball physics
- ✓ Plays like football
- ✓ Decent management option
- ✓ Loads of teams
- ✗ Dodgy lower division data

84

Title contender



NHL 07

Big men carrying
big sticks, on ice

DEVELOPER EA Sports
PUBLISHER EA
WEBSITE www.easports.com/nhl07
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99

System requirements **3**

THE EA SPORTS bandwagon trundles on with the one we care about less than *FIFA* but more than *Madden*. Despite the indifference to the sport in this country, the NHL games have always provided a more than competent rendition of the sliding around on ice business. In fact, playing them is arguably better than watching the sport, in so much as you can actually see the puck.

As ever, this year's version is technically excellent, with all the graphical flourishes and reflections present and correct. The gameplay is extremely tight, and the sport is particularly suited to the 'interactive medium' with a constant ebb and flow whereby one team has a crack at the goal, then loses possession and lets the other lot do their best.

While the action may seem too frantic for any great strategy to be



put into place, fashioning chances through adroit passing is key, and this is helped by having all the passing moves on the right analogue stick. If there's a player free to your left, simply flick the stick left and the puck will be twatted towards him. It's an instantly learnable mechanic, and a genuine step forward, unless of course you don't have a compatible dual analogue pad.

Despite this simplification, elsewhere the controls are a bit convoluted, and remembering what button performs an 'auto-deke' can be a chore, especially if you're not sure what a deke is, auto or otherwise. But if you've got the time to master it, there is, as ever, about a year's worth of play to be had.

Steve Hill



PCZONE

78

Icy precision



MADDEN NFL 07

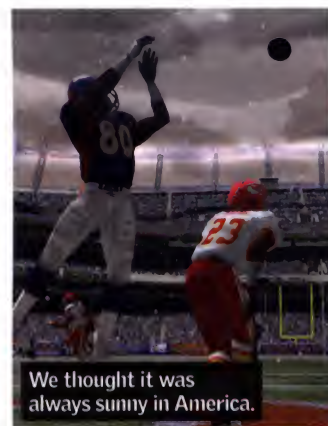
"Hut hut hut, er, hut, hut, hut..."

DEVELOPER EA Sports
PUBLISHER EA
WEBSITE www.easports.com/madden07
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99

System requirements **2**

THIS LATEST MADDEN patch updates the game to version 07, changing various things that were wrong with the 06 version. For example, all of the EAtrax (sic) turned out to be made by crappy short-lived American teen rock bands. These have been replaced with more up-to-date crappy short-lived American teen rock bands, and some Keane, just so everybody's aware that EA still have lots of money. Also, the '06' which appeared in several places throughout the game has been replaced with an '07', and a few players have swapped places in the rosters. Oh, new guy on the box too.

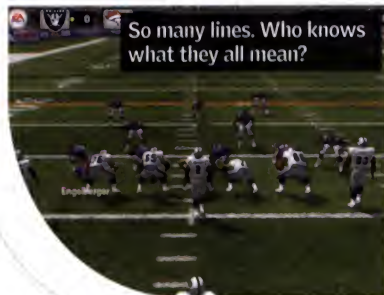
Besides the standard updates, *Madden NFL 07* adds some standard new features to the football itself, not least of which are the lead blocking controls, allowing you to make blocks before switching back to the ball-



carrier. Also added is the defensive-commit, which allows you to focus your defence on a certain position to counter a predictable offence. Further attempts to map analogue pad controls to keyboard and mouse have also been made, which only serve to confuse, so stick with a gamepad.

While *Madden* retains its position as the best NFL game about, and continues to present itself excellently, this update isn't monumental. It's merely the bacon topping on an already bulging turducken. That's turkey, duck and chicken.

Steve Hogarty



PCZONE

71

Predictable touchdown



They do a lovely Croque Monsieur in that café.



War makes such a bloody mess.



Poor war has a derelict face...



...An exploded, smoky face...



...And a mutilated, rubble-strewn face.

FACES OF WAR

Jon Blyth plants a big wet smacker on the prettiest face of war

DEVELOPER Best Way
PUBLISHER Ubisoft
WEBSITE
www.facesofwargame.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £34.99



AT A GLANCE...

Spiritual sequel to *Soldiers: Heroes Of World War II*, this is a hardcore RTS that rewards the strategic and the stubborn.

System requirements

3

HOW IT STACKS

COMPANY OF HEROES 93%

SOLDIERS: HEROES OF WWII 90%

FACES OF WAR 75%

IT'S AN INAUSPICIOUS time to release a WWII strategy game, now that *Company Of Heroes* has just lowered the limbo bar. Anything released now is going to seem like running up to Alexander Graham Bell saying you've just invented shouting out of the window.

But no game can kill a genre, and Best Way have their own proud heritage. *Soldiers: Heroes Of WWII* was a surprise classic from the Ukraine, mixing arcadey direct control with a hardcore strategy edge that would have you panic-saving with every kill.

Faces Of War hasn't fallen far from the tree. Soviet, German and Allied missions, a lack of resource management, the advantageous method of taking direct control of a unit with the cursor keys. Similarly, the picturesque and detailed engine will still punish a lesser processor in busier scenes. Best Way have introduced the fog of war in some missions, though – taking away the only break for those of us with all the strategic instincts of a bra.

The AI of all the units is still great, although the enemies seem smarter. At

one stage, I once told a soldier to use an anti-tank grenade on a nearby vehicle, and the idiot blew himself by standing too close. That's basic Fireworks Code, man. But taking control yourself is more efficient and enjoyable, anyway.

JUMP THE FENCE

The control method is involved, and can feel overwhelming, so unless you're a *Soldiers* veteran, it's worth playing the tutorial levels. Refuelling a tank and detaching a cannon from a car is certainly no one-click process, but it does all add to the sense that you're in control. Until your men repeatedly ignore an order to jump over a fence and get gunned down by a tank, that is.

Best Way have been keen to emphasise that *Faces Of War* isn't the prohibitively hardcore experience of *Soldiers*, and less seasoned tacticians will not feel alienated by the difficulty. So 'easy' has been rebranded Arcade mode, with a warning for those daring to click on Tactical mode that severe challenges lie ahead.

Frankly, it's all still hard, and it still suffers a little from a lack of intuition and dropping you in at the deep end. But the

pleasure and satisfaction to be had from completing a mission is still there, and if you're all cocky from your achievements in *Company Of Heroes*, let *Faces Of War* serve you a barrage of humble pies. **PC7**

PCZONE

Graphics Lovely, if demanding
Sound Decent music, hilariously bad speech
Multiplayer Mais oui

- ✓ A solid challenge
- ✓ Pretty as a picture
- ✓ Rewarding, eventually
- ✗ Occasionally unresponsive
- ✗ Often baffling and overwhelming
- ✗ Can be misheard as faeces of whore

75
In good company



AS DARKNESS FALLS,
YOUR DESTINY DRAWS NEAR

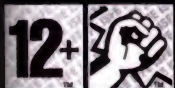
27TH OCTOBER 2006

ONLINE GAMING WITH NO FEES*

GUILD WARS
NIGHTFALL

EU.GUILDWARS.COM

PC DVD
ROM



www.pegi.info

*Requires product purchase and access to Internet. Player is responsible for all applicable Internet fees.

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NCsoft



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AMAZING IN-GAME VISUALS



RULE THE WORLD



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You won't find any of these Indie games in the shops, but you can download them or get trial versions on our DVD.

IndieZone



This month *Martin Korda* sails the seven seas, makes friends and shoots people in another indie gaming extravaganza

DEVASTATIONZONE: TROOPERS

DEVELOPER CGS Software WEBSITE www.cgssoftware.com PRICE \$19.95 (£11)

BIG STOMPY ROBOTS? Massive guns? This is definitely one for action-lovers, but don't let *DevastationZone: Troopers'* basic premise fool you, because it's much more than just another sci-fi third-person shooter – it's an action-blastar that oozes quality.

Playing as a lone soldier, you're sent on a series of increasingly taxing missions against an alien foe. After a tedious dropship-landing section, you're thrown into a cauldron of carnage in which you must annihilate waves of mechanised enemies in order to reach your objective. This can be done by navigating through the maze of canyons

on offer, or by blasting your own routes through the destructible terrain.

What really gives this game its kahoonas though is its array of weapons and upgrades, which help transform it from a decent shooter into a titanic blastathon of mass destruction.

The action is intense and brutal from start to finish, though sometimes the scenery obscures your character, which is irksome during the larger battles. Visually and aurally impressive, *DZ:T* is basic, but its execution is sharper than a well-oiled guillotine.

PCZONE
76



INDIEZONE
GAME
OF THE
MONTH

SOCIAL KUDOS

Based on the strength of all of the relationships you have helped to create, which includes those directly between you and your friends, and those between your friends and the friends they introduced to you. The more relationships, and the stronger they are, the more Kudos you get. Once two of your friends have a strong relationship, they will stay close friends without further help from you. The ones who do not generate any Kudos until they are at 30% strength or more.



Organise social events in the hope people will like you more. Social Kudos: 3



KUDOS

DEVELOPER Positech Games
WEBSITE www.kudosgame.com PRICE \$22.95 (£12)

IMAGINE THE SIMS sans animated characters, depth, humour and variety and maybe, just maybe, you'll get a rough idea of what to expect from this static-screened virtual life simulator wannabe.

Cast as a 20-year-old no hoper with few friends, a rubbish job and zero cash, it's up to you to turn your life around by organising successful social events with your mates, learning new skills in evening classes and making yourself a fitter, happier, more highly-skilled and socially-adept creature.

In principle at least,

Kudos sounds like it could be quite fun. However, once the early novelty wears off, you soon start to realise just how random your constantly fluctuating stat-based mental and physical states are and how depressing the whole experience is, as you're lurching from one rejection to another, slowly turning into a broke, social recluse who spends their nights hunched up in the corner of their bedroom crying into a bowl of week-old Cornflakes, convinced that the postman wants to kill you. So in that respect, it's actually quite realistic. Shame it's so dull, really.

PCZONE
50

SOF/RAIDERS – OPERATION: EAGLE’S TALON

DEVELOPER HyperKat Games WEBSITE www.hyperkat.com PRICE Price: \$12 (£6)

LOOKING FOR SOME fun, stealth-based FPS action on the cheap? Then you're in luck, because *SOF/Raiders* is one of the best FPS indie offerings we've seen in a long time, despite its basic approach and a smattering of clumsy glitches.

As a lone Special Forces operative, you must infiltrate enemy territory and use a subtle combination of stealth and extreme violence to complete your objective.

You can approach each level in any way you wish. Use the stealth-meter and make friends with the shadows if you

fancy yourself as an invisible assassin, or take your chances in the open and blast anything and everything in sight.

Levels are extremely well-crafted, AI is adequate and while the sound effects and visuals are a tad weedy, they don't detract too much from *SOF/Raiders'* qualities as an entertaining shooter.

Reminiscent of *Wolfenstein* – only with some added stealth elements, more freeform levels and a wider range of mission objectives – *SOF/Raiders* is well worth a peek, especially at this price.

PCZONE
71

Wonder if it's got *Solitaire*?



AVAST!

DEVELOPER Primate Games
WEB www.primategames.com PRICE \$19.95 (£11)



I'VE ALWAYS THOUGHT it a bit cheeky to try and palm off a basic boardgame as a videogame. It's right up there with the shamefaced profiteering of selling ten mouthfuls of bottled water for £1.50. Sadly, *Avast!* is just that: no, not a bottle of designer water, but a boardgame masquerading as a videogame.

The basic premise of this pirate-themed turn-based slog is to navigate a fleet of ships around a grid in an attempt to complete objectives such as surrounding an object or scuttling enemy ships.

The problem is, you can only move your ships the exact distance dictated by three dice rolls, meaning endless traipsing up and down each level as you try to line up your ships in the correct positions. Proceedings

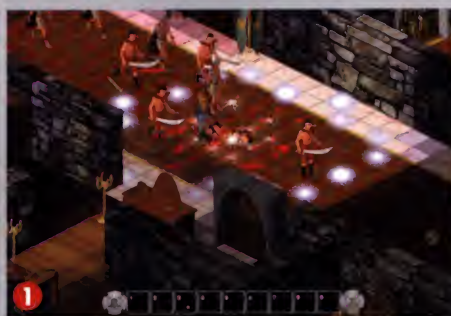


are livened up slightly by some imaginative bonuses, but even these fail to make it that interesting.

Well-presented and slick *Avast!* might be, but when a game's this bereft of gameplay and excitement at the basic level, no amount of polish is going to save it from mediocrity.

PCZONE
43

PCZONE TOP 5 INDIE GAMES



MORNING'S WRATH
www.morningswrath.com
Reviewed issue 163

This hugely accomplished isometric RPG oozes quality from every pore. From the well-written, excellently presented story to the hours of compelling gameplay that lead you on a sprawling, beautifully-designed quest to save your land from destruction, *Morning's Wrath* is a must-buy for any self-respecting RPG fan.



NEW STAR SOCCER 3

www.newstarsoccer.com | Reviewed issue 164

This novel take on the beautiful game melds *Sensi Soccer* with *Football Manager* and *Goal* (the film) to provide the most complete indie gaming footy experience currently available.



FATE

www.playfate.com | Reviewed issue 158

A compelling fantasy RPG, which takes the action-RPG formula of *Diablo* and wraps it in a charismatic, cartoonish package. Oodles of depth and hours of excellent gameplay.



LUGARU: THE RABBIT'S FOOT

www.wolfire.com | Reviewed issue 162

An ambitious and extremely entertaining third-person action/adventure in which you play a killer rabbit bent on revenge after his entire family is murdered. Inspired stuff.



ARMADILLO RUN

www.armadillorun.com | Reviewed issue 171

Physics-based puzzles have never been so much fun. Set up a mix of ramps, pulleys, catapults etc and navigate an armadillo to a specific end location. Simple, yet brilliant.

BUDGET

Games for less – there's no shame...

**BUDGET
GAME
OF THE
MONTH**

ROME: TOTAL WAR

PUBLISHER GSP White Label WEBSITE www.gspsoftware.co.uk PRICE £9.99

IS THERE ANYONE who hasn't bought this yet? Really? What have you been doing with your time? Well, you can fix that now. This is an opportunity for useless gamers such as yourself to pick up the last Creative Assembly masterpiece on the cheap before the brand-new *Medieval II: Total War* hits the shelves.

Rome: Total War is strategy perfection; the kind of game that Caesar himself would have played if he'd concentrated on inventing the personal computer rather than putting his profile on coins and being knifed in the back by Brutus.



No mowing required.

Sort your faction's Roman troops out on the 2D Risk-style map before playing out the individual skirmishes on a 3D battlefield comprising of thousands of individually-animated units – so good that BBC2 used it in their TV programme *Time Commanders*. *Rome: Total War* is utterly compelling, insistently tugging at your trouser leg and pleading with big, blue, watery eyes to have *just one more go*. For the love of Zeus, grab a copy now.

Jamie Sefton



Fancy hats should always win the day.



Blue-and-white pyjama bottoms, £4.99, Primark.



War's a chilling business.

**PCZONE
92**

CONDEMNED: CRIMINAL ORIGINS

PUBLISHER GSP White Label WEBSITE www.gspsoftware.co.uk PRICE £9.99

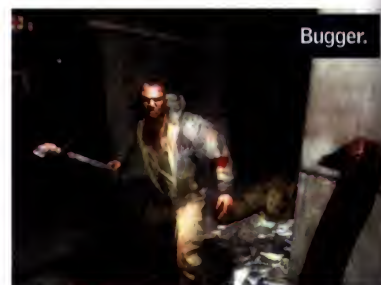
I'M NOT KEEN on eating my own words; they are, after all, normally quite foul. But it was only last month that I declared you could tell the quality of a game by how fast it goes to budget. Now up steps *Condemned* to prove me wrong.

From F.E.A.R. developers Monolith, *Condemned* is a dark and brutal first-person beat 'em up which also features the occasional CSI element. You play as FBI agent Ethan Thomas, who's framed early on in the game by a serial killer. Giving chase, you make your way through some of gaming's most dilapidated settings, from abandoned houses to derelict apartment stores.

However, the game's main emphasis is on the visceral melee combat and makeshift weapons; twatting a



Ouch.



Bugger.

homeless (but mindlessly violent) junkie round the head with a gas pipe has never been so satisfying. Unless you managed to zap him with your Tazer gun as well. It's full of creepy stuff and comes highly recommended at this paltry price.

Suzy Wallace

**PCZONE
84**



Now you're f***ed.

THIS MONTH PCZONE SAVED MONEY BY...

Jamie eating the Haribo sweets at Liepzig instead of having a proper lunch:
Saving: 7 Euros



Will finding 80p credit in the snack machine:
Saving: 80p



Suzy not getting charged for a bookcase at Ikea:
Saving: £55



HIDDEN & DANGEROUS 2

PUBLISHER Mastertronic WEBSITE www.mastertronic.com PRICE £9.99

AS FAR AS tactical shooters go, *Hidden & Dangerous 2* has more tactics and shooting than a game of chess played with revolvers. Indeed, back in the carefree days of 2003, when special 'bump-mapping' amazed all and magazines were the lovecraft of a man and his typewriter, *H&D2* was king of the thinking-man's blasters, and there's still nothing quite like it today.

Sure, these days the graphics are looking a little rough and there's still the odd AI bug lurking around, but *Hidden & Dangerous 2* remains a wholly playable and enjoyable experience. At times it's harder than a concrete donkey, but addictive enough that you won't care. There's a huge variety of challenges and levels too, and the top-down RTS mode can be useful for planning your attack.

True, for combat and a much-lacked co-op mode, *Ghost Recon: Advanced*



Warfighter is by far the superior experience. However, if you like a little strategy in your war, you can't go wrong for a tenner.

Andy Robinson

PCZONE
80

The new dance craze was all the rage.

CIVILIZATION III DELUXE

PUBLISHER Mastertronic WEBSITE www.mastertronic.com PRICE £9.99

WITH *CIV IV* and its excellent expansion *Warlords* already out, is it really worth shelling out £9.99 for the previous, weaker series instalment, even if it does have all of its expansion packs? We don't think so.

After sampling the fourth game's high production values, well-realised religion system and entirely superior multiplayer offering, we couldn't possibly recommend spending your cash on anything else.

But if you absolutely must throw your money at it, *Civ 3* offers an enjoyable turn-based experience, if graphically lacking, and the addictive *Civ* template is still moving all the gears. It might be more worthwhile at a lower asking price, but at £9.99, you're better off shelling out the extra tenner for *Civ IV*.

Andy Robinson

PCZONE
66



And the rest...

Old games + cheap prices = budget heaven (or hell)



CONFLICT: VIETNAM

£4.99, MASTERTRONIC

The third instalment of the *Conflict* series places your band of soldiers into the humid confines of the Vietnamese jungle. This squad-based shooter offers tense moments, but with dated graphics and no multiplayer, it's best consigned to history.

PCZONE
61



PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE SANDS OF TIME

£4.99, MASTERTRONIC

The first title in the recent *POP* series and regarded by many fans as the best, this offers a wealth of climbing, somersaulting and gorgeous soft-focus Persian scenery. And with less emphasis on the fighting, you'll have more time to ogle Farah instead.

PCZONE
80



CSI MIAMI

£9.99, FOCUS MULTIMEDIA

Taking swabs from a woman's mouth while sunning yourself in Florida might not seem like a bad career move, but this game lacks interactivity, with interrogations simply a matter of exhausting all the options. Stick to the TV show instead.

PCZONE
42

PCZONE TOP 5 BUDGET BUYS



1 FAR CRY

£9.99, MASTERTRONIC

Better than *HL2*? So some say. The best non-gravity gun shooter of recent years anyway. An island paradise with extra explosions and terrific enemy AI.



2 THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND

£4.99, MASTERTRONIC

Bethesda's classic free-roaming RPG now offers the cheapest goblin-bashing around. Essential stuff.



3 BEYOND GOOD & EVIL

£9.99, FOCUS MULTIMEDIA

Glorious story-telling, engaging gameplay and the greenest lips in gaming don't make *BG&E* a must-buy. Deep, imaginative, brilliant.



4 THE CHRONICLES OF RIDDICK: ESCAPE FROM BUTCHER BAY

£9.99, BESTSELLER

Great melee, sneaky stealth and oodles of lawless violence – not all console conversions are a pile of old poo.



5 MEDIEVAL: TOTAL WAR - GOLD EDITION

£9.99, MASTERTRONIC

A true classic, *Medieval* lets troops do battle in real-time and lets you get tactical in this warfare masterpiece.



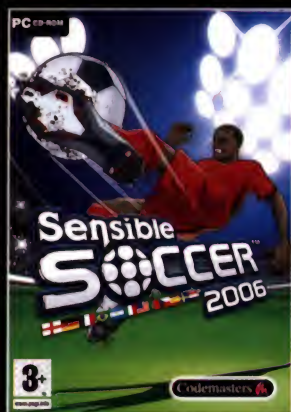
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YOUR SHOUT!

Write in if you think you're bard enough...

THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION

Our score: 95%

I may be the only person in the world who thinks this, but *The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind* is better than *Oblivion*. I have a few simple reasons for thinking this.

First, *Morrowind* is much bigger and longer – it took me less than a month to finish *Oblivion*'s main quest and all the guild stuff. Second, *Oblivion* only has four guilds you can do missions for. *Morrowind* had... Well, a lot. Third, *Oblivion* is way too easy – *Morrowind* was always challenging me, whereas in *Oblivion* I barely died at all. OK, *Oblivion* is still a good game, but it definitely lacks the charm *Morrowind* had by the bucketful.

Andrew Musins: 91%

THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION

OUR SCORE: 95%

Or '*Morrowind*' with horses. Yes, it's prettier – much prettier, but you'll pay through your graphics card. Aside from that, little has changed. Even the 'fast travel' was there to a certain extent with the stilt riders in the last *Elder Scrolls* game. Is it worth it? Hell, yes! Since *Morrowind* was almost perfect, even slightly upping the stakes has got to be good. My only gripe is that on the map, Cyrodiil is joined by land to *Morrowind* – but wasn't it an island? Or did I miss a bridge somewhere?

Trav Smith: 92%

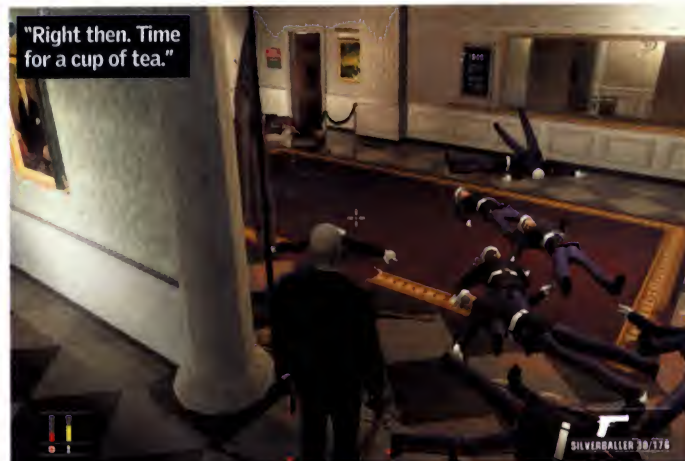
SIN: EPISODES

OUR SCORE: 83%

Many reviewers of *SiN* have said that it's not *Half-Life 2*, blah, blah, blah. What they seem to completely fail to realise is that *SiN* is an old-school shooter; not a lot of puzzles and just straight-up blasting of anything that dares cross your path. As a result, it's enormously dumb fun – sure, *HL2* and others have more toys and look more realistic, but *SiN* looks good in a comic-book way.

SiN: Episodes is hugely enjoyable while it lasts, which is the game's only major

Review of the month



"Right then. Time for a cup of tea."

HITMAN: BLOOD MONEY

Our score: 84%

Hurtle down the street like a rabbit with a Doberman attached to its arse, jump, mantle, shuffle across ledge, leap to opposite outcrop, shuffle some more, attach bomb to rope, find nearest darkened corner, then wait for it... BANG!

At that moment, when I crushed a sexy female assassin dressed as a giant crow with a falling piano, I realised that *Hitman: Blood Money* was a truly enthralling experience. It's not perfect – visuals are functional but not divine, and the AI can be quite shaky. However, the diamond-solid gameplay – including the Accidental Death and Blood Money systems – more than make up for it, and you really feel that you're as close to a cold-blooded killer-for-cash as you're likely to get without being arrested.

Rick Lane: 90%



SiN: Episodes: good old-fashioned fun.

downer – as well as the fact that depending on how many episodes there are, the complete series could be much more expensive than one full-priced title.

Robert Kirk: 85%

YOU DO THE REVIEWS!

Agree? Disagree? Well, the world wouldn't be the wonderful place it was if we all thought the same way. If you fancy sharing your own thoughts with your fellow readers, then jot them down (we find the recent advancements in parchment and ink technology to be handy), trim the amount of words to a MAXIMUM of 100, add a score out of 100 then send them to the address below. If we think they're worthy of sharing, we'll print them here. Better yet, if your letter is selected as our Review Of The Month, you'll be showered with a gift of some description.

Send your reviews to: yourshout@pczone.co.uk, or stick them in an envelope and post them to: PC ZONE, Your Shout, Future Publishing, 2 Balcombe Street, London, NW1 6NW.



Oblivion splits opinion this month.

BUYER'S GUIDE

The bestest games your money can buy...



PCZONE TOP 5 GAMES BEGINNING WITH 'F'

- 1 **FRONTIER: ELITE II**
PCZ ISSUE: 9
- 2 **FAR CRY**
PCZ ISSUE: 140
- 3 **FADE TO BLACK**
PCZ ISSUE: 31
- 4 **FINAL FANTASY VII**
PCZ ISSUE: 66
- 5 **FULL THROTTLE**
PCZ ISSUE: 27



PCZONE TOP 5 GAMES WITHIN A GAME

- 1 **MANIAC MANSION (DAY OF THE TENTACLE)**
PCZ ISSUE: 7
- 2 **CHOCOBO RACING (FFVII)**
PCZ ISSUE: 66
- 3 **AIR HOCKEY (BEYOND GOOD & EVIL)**
PCZ ISSUE: 138
- 4 **LET'S GET READY TO BUMBLE (GTA: SAN ANDREAS)**
PCZ ISSUE: 157
- 5 **POOL (DUKE NUKEM 3D)**
PCZ ISSUE: 40

PCZONE TOP 5 MOST SCREWED-UP LEGO STAR WARS II CHARACTERS

- 1 **MASTER LEIA ORGANA (YODA HEAD, LEIA BODY AND LEGS)**
- 2 **CHEW SKY WALKER (CHEWIE HEAD, LUKE BODY AND LEGS)**
- 3 **LUKE YO LO (LUKE HEAD, YODA BODY, HAN SOLO LEGS)**
- 4 **GAR WAN DO (GAMORREAN HEAD, OBI-WAN BODY, LANDO'S LEGS)**
- 5 **CHIEF VA PIO (JAWA HEAD, VADER BODY, C3PO LEGS)**



Shooters

Must buy!



HALF-LIFE 2

PCZ Issue: 148 - 97%

Everyone knew this would be good, but no-one quite expected the tour de force that Valve managed to pull off. Easily a contender for the best game of all time, *Half-Life 2* is just one stunning set-piece after another, and is guaranteed to leave you dribbling with awe. Be warned though, a (fast) online connection is needed for Valve's mandatory Steam delivery service.



BATTLEFIELD 2

PCZ Issue: 157 - 94%

If it's online action you want, look no further. *BF2* sets the gold standard for team-based shooting, with huge 64-player maps, squad and commander modes and the best graphics ever. Just make sure you have a ninja PC.



BUDGET

FAR CRY

PCZ Issue: 140 - 93%

In many eyes, Crytek's shooter outweighs even the mighty *Half-Life 2* in its tension, tactics and expansive level design. It's a mighty achievement with seemingly freeform action and the best sniping money can buy.



HL2: EPISODE ONE

PCZ Issue: 170 - 91%

Suffering slightly from thematic overlap from *HL2*, *Ep One* nevertheless contains the greatest moments from the entire *HL* series. Warm, funny and thrilling, it may be short, but the first five minutes are worth the entry fee alone.



CALL OF DUTY 2

PCZ Issue: 162 - 91%

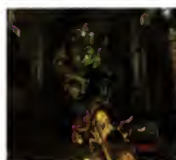
Brutal, relentless and totally gripping, the WWII shooter sequel packs more action into a single level than most pack into an entire game. Epic scale battles and intense drama. World War II at its unforgiving best.



F.E.A.R.

PCZ Issue: 160 - 90%

With more shocks and scares than an episode of *Revenge* (and a much higher body count), *F.E.A.R.* pushes the shooter part of FPS to the limit. It might not be the scariest game ever, but it will make you jump.



PREY

PCZ Issue: 170 - 86%

Prey hits the PC after an 11-year wait and proves to be a filthy-gorgeous organic sci-fi shooter with fantastic weapons, scenery and monsters. Not the best combat, but stuffed full of original ideas.

Strategy

NEW ENTRY!

Must buy!



COMPANY OF HEROES

PCZ Issue: 173 - 93%

The fact that *Company Of Heroes* has knocked *Rome: Total War* from its strategy throne is testament enough to how utterly refined and slick it is. Relic have taken the best bits from strategy games and stripped out the crap, leaving you with a game that's fun, intelligent, accessible, taxing, tactical and exciting. And with that many positive words in one sentence, you know it must be good. Essential.



BUDGET

ROME: TOTAL WAR

PCZ Issue: 148 - 93%

Mixing breathtaking 3D with troop numbers reminiscent of a Hollywood epic - along with staggering historical accuracy - *Rome* is a stunning strategy masterpiece. Hell, how many other titles are made into TV shows?



CIVILIZATION IV

PCZ Issue: 162 - 92%

A Buyer's Guide without a *Civ* game would be a sorry, sorry place, and luckily the latest version does the business with aplomb. Violent Buddhist Romans take over the world.



RISE OF NATIONS: RISE OF LEGENDS

PCZ Issue: 168 - 91%

Takes the great gameplay of *RON*, improves on it with elements from *Civ IV* and *Total War* and wraps the whole lot in a gorgeous sci-fi setting. An RTS bursting with innovation and imagination.



LOTR: THE BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH

PCZ Issue: 149 - 91%

Although the *LOTR* RTS doesn't hold a candle to the *Total War* franchise, there's nothing quite like ordering a Balrog around for guaranteed strategy fun.



BUDGET

SOLDIERS: HEROES OF WORLD WAR II

PCZ Issue: 144 - 90%

The strategy of *Commandos* meets the fun of *Cannon Fodder* in this top-down game of tactics. Being the underdog has never been so much fun, and the rumble of tanks never so worrying.



RISE OF NATIONS

PCZ Issue: 129 - 90%

One of the best of the 'last generation' of empire-builders, *Rise Of Nations* - coupled with exemplary expansion pack *Thrones And Patriots* - is a uniquely satisfying and addictive treatment of the *Civ* genre.

Action/Adventure

Must buy!



MAX PAYNE 2: THE FALL OF MAX PAYNE

PCZ Issue: 136 - 93%

The chosen poison for certain PCZ staffers after a long hard day, Payne's second outing is perhaps the most pixel-perfect example of joy-through-excessive-destruction on the market. Slicker than slick, breathtaking and quite beautiful, *Max Payne 2* provides the greatest gaming kicks that money can buy. It's extremely short, but so tense, well designed and replayable that you just won't care.



GRAND THEFT AUTO: SAN ANDREAS

PCZ Issue: 155 - 92%

To think that the simple top-down car game has turned into this - a work of creative genius. Violent, brutal, smutty, freeform and hilarious - *San Andreas* is the summit of gaming achievement.



BUDGET

SPLINTER CELL: CHAOS THEORY

PCZ Issue 154 - 91%

A tour de force from Ubisoft, *Chaos Theory* takes the *Splinter Cell* format and runs with it in solo, co-op and the now well-established spies vs mercenaries multiplayer. Smooth, lithe and good with a knife.



FAHRENHEIT

PCZ Issue: 159 - 90%

Murder most foul, with you as the killer. This twisting, turning, brilliantly-told plot features multiple character control, split-screen tension, branching scenes and several endings. From the brains behind *The Nomad Soul*.



PSYCHONAUTS

PCZ Issue: 156 - 90%

Clever, witty, impeccably detailed and absolutely off its rocker - *Psychonauts* is proof that the anarchic edge of LucasArts hasn't completely left us. A slightly flawed game in some respects, but still a dazzling feat.



BUDGET

BEYOND GOOD & EVIL

PCZ Issue: 138 - 89%

We heap praise on this game on a monthly basis, but it's for a reason. Michel Ancel's superb journey through the strange land of Illios is nothing short of storytelling magic. It's cheap now, so go out and buy it.



PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE TWO THRONES

PCZ Issue: 164 - 86%

The shirtless wonder finally makes it into the Buyer's Guide, not that any of his outings can be considered bad games. *TTT* manages to get all the ingredients just right this time.

MMOs



MUST BUY!
WORLD OF WARCRAFT
PCZ Issue: 152 - 95%
Blizzard's recreation of the classic strategy world in MMO form doesn't disappoint. Beautiful to look at, absorbing to play and with more content than you can shake a magic stick at.



EVERQUEST II
PCZ Issue: 150 - 95%
A Star Trek to WoW's Star Wars, EQII gives the original a much needed lick of paint, a whole new world to play in and a greater sense of depth and immersion. A time-sink in the true, classic sense.



GUILD WARS
PCZ Issue: 156 - 94%
How to make a gaming genre accessible to the masses. It shines with polish, thought and lack of monthly subscription fees. Newbies can feel at home too, thanks to a totally skills-based set-up.



EVE ONLINE
PCZ Issue: 130 - 88%
Elite online has been a long-held fantasy and this space sim is the closest yet to making it a reality. Its slow pace belies the options on offer, from mining or trading to piracy - it's up to you.



CITY OF HEROES
PCZ Issue: 155 - 86%
Nothing beats the feeling of spandex and fire-beams shooting from your eyes. This super-powered MMO lets you live all those heroic dreams to the full. Nietzsche would have a field day.

Simulation



MUST BUY!
X3: REUNION
PCZ Issue: 162 - 92%
Finally, a space sim to better X2: The Threat, and it just happens to be the sequel. Possibly the best-looking game ever to appear on a PC. Plus, it plays well too.



IL-2 STURMOVIK: FORGOTTEN BATTLES
PCZ Issue: 128 - 92%
While flight sims are becoming rarer and rarer, at least the quality remains high. None more so than this ultra-classy WWII combat sim. Chocks away, comrade!



MICROSOFT FLIGHT SIMULATOR 2004: A CENTURY OF FLIGHT
PCZ Issue: 133 - 89%
No, you don't shoot things, no there's no mission structure, yes there's the best non-combat flight experience to date. History can be fun.



BUDGET
FREELANCER
PCZ Issue: 128 - 84%
If X2 is too slow for you, Freelancer should fit the bill. Plenty of trading, bounty-hunting and space piracy, but with the emphasis on action rather than realism. Space has never been this much fun.



FALCON 4.0
PCZ Issue: 158 - 82%
An example of fanbase enthusiasm saving a once-dead series, Falcon 4.0 lives on thanks to the dedication of its hard-working players. The best modern-day fighter sim on the market.

Driving/Racing



NEW ENTRY!
GTR 2
PCZ Issue: 173 - 92%
Can't afford a Ferrari? Then pick up this scarily realistic driving sim and race the car of your dreams, complete with an improved driving model, new modes and many other improvements.



MUST BUY!
GT LEGENDS
PCZ Issue: 161 - 92%
While GTR takes care of modern-day racing, GT Legends does the business for historical driving. A natural successor to Grand Prix Legends, it's like the swinging '60s never ended.



GTR
PCZ Issue: 153 - 90%
As real as it gets. Probably. The complete driving solution on a PC, with all the drifting, shunting and racing you need. Invest in a decent force-feedback steering wheel and pedals set-up though.



LIVE FOR SPEED
PCZ Issue: 158 - 90%
Online racing at its best. Realistic handling, hilarious crashes and a racing community second to none. On the right servers that is. A remarkable achievement by such a small team.



NEED FOR SPEED: MOST WANTED
PCZ Issue: 163 - 88%
Thrill-packed racer from EA, this time with the emphasis on high-speed police chases and notoriety factors. You can still make like Westwood with the car pimping though.

God games



MUST BUY!
THE MOVIES
PCZ Issue: 162 - 95%
Life as a movie mogul, games don't get better than this. Not only a god/management game par excellence, but also a complete home movie-making kit. Brilliant.



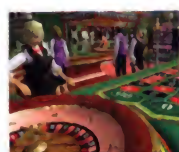
BLACK & WHITE 2
PCZ Issue: 161 - 93%
The original split opinion, and this sequel does the same. We love it though, and think it's erased all the problems as well as adding plenty of new options to boot. It's gorgeous too.



BUDGET
BLACK & WHITE
PCZ Issue: 150 - 90%
Lionhead's controversial vision brought out your good/bad side and featured an ambitious mix of role-playing, strategy and great AI. It can now be yours for a mere fiver, making it a god among mortals.



BUDGET
EVIL GENIUS
PCZ Issue: 147 - 84%
Ever wanted to say "No Mr Bond, I expect you to die", or create giant evil lairs inside hollow volcanoes? Well now you can with this great megalomaniac sim. It's always fun being bad.



VEGAS: MAKE IT BIG
PCZ Issue: 135 - 84%
An in-depth tycoon game with all the 3D graphical glitz and glamour of Vegas itself. Provide hotels, casinos and over-priced magic shows that suck the money out of the punters.

Sport



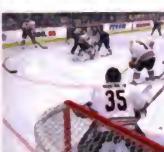
MUST BUY!
PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 5
PCZ Issue: 161 - 93%
Football, football, football. Morning, noon and night. The beautiful game in a beautiful game. Not only the best version of Pro Evo ever, also the best footy game ever.



FOOTBALL MANAGER 2006
PCZ Issue: 162 - 90%
One year on and the best footy management game is even better. Quick Tactics, half-time team talks, physio reports - changes are small but add up to a terrific whole.



TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 2006
PCZ Issue: 161 - 85%
Travel through time playing Tiger Woods throughout history. Only in an EA Sports game. Tiger 06 is the best PC golf game yet, mainly thanks to the two career modes.



NHL 06
PCZ Issue: 160 - 84%
Ice hockey may not be the UK's number one sporting pastime, but that doesn't make EA Sports' incarnation of it any less fun. Exciting, breathless and violent balls-out fun for the whole family.



MADDEN 2005
PCZ Issue: 152 - 84%
Although the 07 version is now upon us, this is actually the better option (at least until 08 arrives). In truth, there's little to differ between the versions, but this one just feels more fluid.

RPGs



MUST BUY!
THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION
PCZ Issue: 167 - 95%
Oblivion's sublime graphics, intuitive character-creation and massive freeform gameplay put paid to the myth that you have to own a beard to enjoy RPGs.



BUDGET
KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC
PCZ Issue: 137 - 94%
KOTOR is the best Star Wars game of recent years. Moving, dramatic and fairly adult in tone, it also has a hefty dose of lightsabers to keep you happy.



BUDGET
THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND
PCZ Issue: 116 - 94%
Possibly the most intimidating, yet wonderful game we've played - the breadth and depth of Morrowind remains a remarkable achievement.



BUDGET
DEUS EX
PCZ Issue: 93 - 94%
This remains the benchmark in FPS RPGs. Twisting sci-fi plots, exciting freeform levels and some moments of pure exhilaration and drama help retail Deus Ex as the alpha male of the gaming world.



BUDGET
NEVERWINTER NIGHTS
PCZ Issue: 118 - 91%
It may not have the depth of Fallout, but the customisation options in this are so extensive that it's been granted a very long life. Still a wonderfully immersive game.

INCOMING!

All approximate monthly dates are correct at the time of going to press

October

BATTLEFIELD 2142
CAESAR IV
DARK MESSIAH: MIGHT & MAGIC
FOOTBALL MANAGER 2007
FLIGHT SIMULATOR X
GOTHIC 3
GUILD WARS: NIGHTFALL
NEVERWINTER NIGHTS 2
SAM & MAX
SCARFACE: THE WORLD IS YOURS
THE SIMS 2: PETS
SPLINTER CELL: DOUBLE AGENT
STAR WARS: EMPIRE AT WAR - FORCES OF CORRUPTION
STRONGHOLD LEGENDS
WARHAMMER 40,000: DAWN OF WAR - DARK CRUSADE

Late 2006

ARMED ASSAULT
F.E.A.R.: EXTRACTION POINT
INFERNAL
JOINT TASK FORCE
LOTR: BFME2 - THE RISE OF THE WITCH-KING
THE LORD OF THE RINGS ONLINE: SHADOWS OF ANGMAR
MIDDLE-EARTH: TOTAL WAR
NEED FOR SPEED: CARBON
PHANTASY STAR UNIVERSE
RAINBOW SIX: VEGAS
RAYMAN RAVING RABBIDS
RESIDENT EVIL 4
STAR TREK: LEGACY
TEST DRIVE UNLIMITED
WARHAMMER: MARK OF CHAOS
THE WITCHER
WORLD OF WARCRAFT: THE BURNING CRUSADE

EA
VU GAMES
UBISOFT
SEGA
MICROSOFT
JOWOOD
NC SOFT
ATARI
TELLTALE GAMES
VU GAMES
EA
UBISOFT
ACTIVISION
2K GAMES
THQ

IDEA GAMES
VU GAMES
PLAYLOGIC
VU GAMES
EA
CODEMASTERS
SEGA
EA
SEGA
UBISOFT
UBISOFT
UBISOFT
BETHESDA
ATARI
NAMCO
CD PROJEKT
VU GAMES



"No F*ing Lightweights!"**



computerandvideogames.com

"Addicted since 1981, reborn in 2006"



PCZONE

HARDWARE

Better gaming through technology

Is this it?

WHEN I SIT down in front of my PC, I like to properly immerse myself in my games. To me, 'playing on the computer' is a wholesome way of escaping the day-to-day drudgery of self-assessment forms, supermarket queues and Sunday night TV. Reality is dismissed, belief is suspended and all those tiresome everyday rules – don't steal, don't let off bombs, don't stab people in the face – are there for the breaking.

So I find it rather worrying that certain developers are taking steps to punctuate my gaming experience with life-like billboards with dynamically-updating adverts. Furthermore, the billboards' surfaces will be made indestructible. I'm well aware that companies like to preserve their brand, but an unmarked Coca-Cola hoarding looming over a ferocious battle really takes the biscuit.

I don't mind the occasional signboard in a footie sim – a pitch wouldn't look right if it wasn't fenced in by ads – but I object to spending a sizeable wedge of hard-earned cash on a glorified marketing platform masquerading as a lacklustre, bug-filled shooter.

And how invasive will all this be? Will the server keep a note of players looking in the direction of ads? Will it get to the stage where you won't be able to gain access to better guns or the next level until you click on five billboards? Me, paranoid? You're damn right.

Wandy

Phil Wand, hardware editor

BIG SCREEN IN YOUR POCKET

Play and record video on new Archos models

FRENCH OUTFIT ARCHOS have introduced their fourth-generation of portable media players, consisting of three new products.

The ARCHOS 404 costs £230, weighs less than 200g and measures just 100x78mm with a 320x240 display. The 30GB device comes with earphones and a charge/synch USB cable. There's a built-in microphone and connections for headphones, TV, plus optional accessories which include a bullet camera.

The flagship ARCHOS 504 weighs 315g, measures 130x78mm and features

a 480x272 16:9 widescreen display. It's available with up to 160GB and costs £340.

The ARCHOS 604 weighs 255g, measures 130x78mm and has the same LCD from the 504. It has the same features and 30GB storage capacity as the 404.

All models display BMP, JPEG and PNG files, and will decode MP3, MPEG-4 and Windows Media (including protected content). With software plug-ins, you can read AAC, AC3, plus MPEG-2 and H.264 videos up to DVD resolution.

Video playback is around five hours and

music playback around 15.

Unless you need the capacity of the 504, pick of the bunch is the widescreen 604. If you can wait, ARCHOS plan to add wireless to the 604 later this year and an integrated camera to the 404.

www.archos.com



Get up to twice the screen real estate of an iPod.

NEWS ROUND-UP

At least two memory vendors have begun offering 1,100MHz PC2-8800 premium DDR2 memory. Although this is an exciting prospect for serious overclockers and for people who simply must have the very best of everything, Core 2 Duos clock best when their bus speed is matched to the RAM. So to make the £352 outlay worthwhile, you're going to need to more than double your processor's FSB – you're also going to need a board capable of supplying at minimum 2.4V to each module, or an external supply such as the DDR Maximizer. Still think you need it? ocz.com, corsair.com and hipro-tech.com

Yet another hole in Internet Explorer means you should only be using it for updating Windows and for visiting idiot banks in the UK, many of whom are insistent you use Microsoft's wobbly antique (Abbey National plc, Europe's second larger lender, still doesn't support Firefox). With the US government telling us that the biggest risks to your PC are flaws in your browser, if you're still clinging to IE, think about looking at the Web through something else. getfirefox.com



eBay your iPod before Christmas.

ZUNE UPDATE

Plenty of features to tempt Apple fans

IN THE TWO months since we announced Microsoft's iPod-rival, we've only been guessing at what the little player would be capable of.

Now we know. Zune will have a 3-inch LCD screen, 30GB hard drive, USB 2.0 interface, wireless connectivity and an optional FM tuner so you can catch

Wogan in the mornings.

The device will be sold in a number of formats, including the Travel Pack with earphones and travel bag, the Car Pack with FM tuner and car charger, and the Home A/V Pack with output cables, docking station, sync cable and wireless remote. Pricing remains a mystery. www.comingzune.com

WARNING:
THIS MONTH'S
HARD WORDS

BY STEVE HOGARTY

LIGHTWAVE: A departing hand gesture lacking in any sort of genuine enthusiasm. **ARCHOS:** Massive catalogue-based UK retailer, specialising in supervillain gadgets and accessories. **OCZ:** Upcoming spin-off of popular TV series *The OC*, in which the entire cast are incarcerated in the prison from *Oz*. **THERMAL PASTE:** A substitute for toothpaste in theoretically hilarious practical jokes, but due to toxic components can actually be fatal when ingested. **JEANTECH:** Burgeoning new industry, incorporating devices ranging from the in-built massage system to the clap-up, clap-down fly. **WIDGET:** A fearsome combination of a walrus, a budgie and a parrot. Leaves massive shits on sandpaper before reciting the alphabet and swimming away.

CROSSHAIR SPECIFICATION

CPU AM2 Athlon 64/X2/FX/Sempron **Chipset** ATI CrossFire Xpress 3200 (RD580/SB600) **Memory** 4 x Dual-channel DDR2 800/667/533 (32 GB max) **Expansion** 2 x PCI-E x16 SLI support, 1 x PCI-E x1, 2 x PCI **Audio** Realtek ALC883 (7.1) **Internally** 3 x USB (6 ports), 1 x FDD, 2 x IDE (4 devices), 6 x SATA, 2 x FireWire **Externally** PS/2 keyboard and mouse, 1 x optical, 1 x coax S/PDIF, 2 x SATA, 2 x LAN, 4 x USB, 1 x FireWire **Storage** 4 x UDMA133/100/66/33, 6 x SATA II, RAID 0, 1, 0+1, 10 **Warranty** 36 months

KA3 MVP EXTREME SPECIFICATION

CPU AM2 Athlon 64/X2/FX/Sempron **Chipset** NVIDIA nForce 590 **Memory** 4 x Dual-channel DDR2 800/667/533 (8 GB max) **Expansion** 2 x PCI-E x16 SLI support, 1 x PCI-E x1, 3 x PCI **Audio** SupremeFX add-in audio card (7.1) **Internally** 3 x USB (6 ports), 1 x FDD, 1 x IDE (2 devices), 6 x SATA, 1 x FireWire **Externally** PS/2 keyboard and mouse, 1 x optical, 1 x coax S/PDIF, 2 x SATA, 2 x LAN, 4 x USB, 1 x FireWire **Storage** 1 x UDMA133/100/66/33, 6 x SATA II, RAID 0, 1, 0+1, 5, JBOD **Warranty** 36 months

CROSSHAIR & KA3 MVP EXTREME

CROSSHAIR: PRICE £150 **MANUFACTURER** Asus **WEBSITE** uk.asus.com | **KA3 MVP EXTREME: PRICE** £95 **MANUFACTURER** ECS **WEBSITE** www.ecs.com.tw

MY, HOW FICKLE we gamers are. Had I received this juicy twosome of AMD boards not six months ago, and had the cloning technology been available, I would have gladly made a duplicate of me so that I could be beside myself with joy and possibly hold hands.

Today, people are so desperate for Conroe, you can almost see them running on the spot. Core 2 Duo is that little bit faster, cheaper and new. It manages to be earnestly crazy and madly sensible, all in one – an alluring mix for which AMD, not Intel, always used to be famous.

But that's not to say we should give up on AMD. You can still buy a proper processor for little more than £100 and, with a decent board beneath it, wring out some impressive benchmark results. Two products which fit the bill are the ASUS CROSSHAIR and the ECS KA3 MVP Extreme.

CROSSHAIR

At £150, the ASUS board is expensive, but it does come with more copper than a plumber's van and what marketing types would describe as 'surprise and delight' features: ambient lighting, easy CMOS reset and a separate soundcard; even the labels on the backplane glow like a high-end amplifier. The bundle is like a Christmas stocking.

In addition, the ASUS is jam-packed with BIOS options – so many, that I doubt there's one person on the planet who will use half of them. For owners of a less technical bent, there are profiles to help you wring out the best from your gear without needing to know how it works.

KA3 MVP

The KA3 MVP is at an instant advantage thanks to being £55 cheaper – equivalent to a decent amount of RAM. It also provides a slew of BIOS options and, like the CROSSFIRE, supports two x16 video cards working in tandem. Performance of the two boards is identical, although a lack of CAS

memory options on the ECS will cramp the style of overclockers and is a strange omission for any product which is targeted at enthusiasts.

The only genuine complaints are about inconsequential things, such as the KA3's budget look and feel, or the fact the backplane has no FireWire connector, or the way the front panel header is old-fashioned fiddly – the CROSSHAIR has a proprietary device to simplify things. All things considered, it's an honest, stable, feature-laden board.

CORE BLIMEY

However good these Athlon platforms are, you can't escape the fact that a £230 E6600 can out-drag a £565 FX-62; it's hard to see why anyone is going to spend money on high-end AMD kit unless the company sets about its price list with a claymore. So although these are both great boards, it would be wrong of me to score them too high when the reality is that you shouldn't be buying either.

PCZONE
CROSSHAIR

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PCZONE
KA3 MVP

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GEFORCE 7950 GX2

PRICE £400 MANUFACTURER XFX
WEBSITE www.xfxforce.co.uk

FATTY HERE IS a high-tech sandwich of two high-end GPUs that are joined at the hip by a clever PCI-E bridge device. It's fully supported by the hardware you own now.

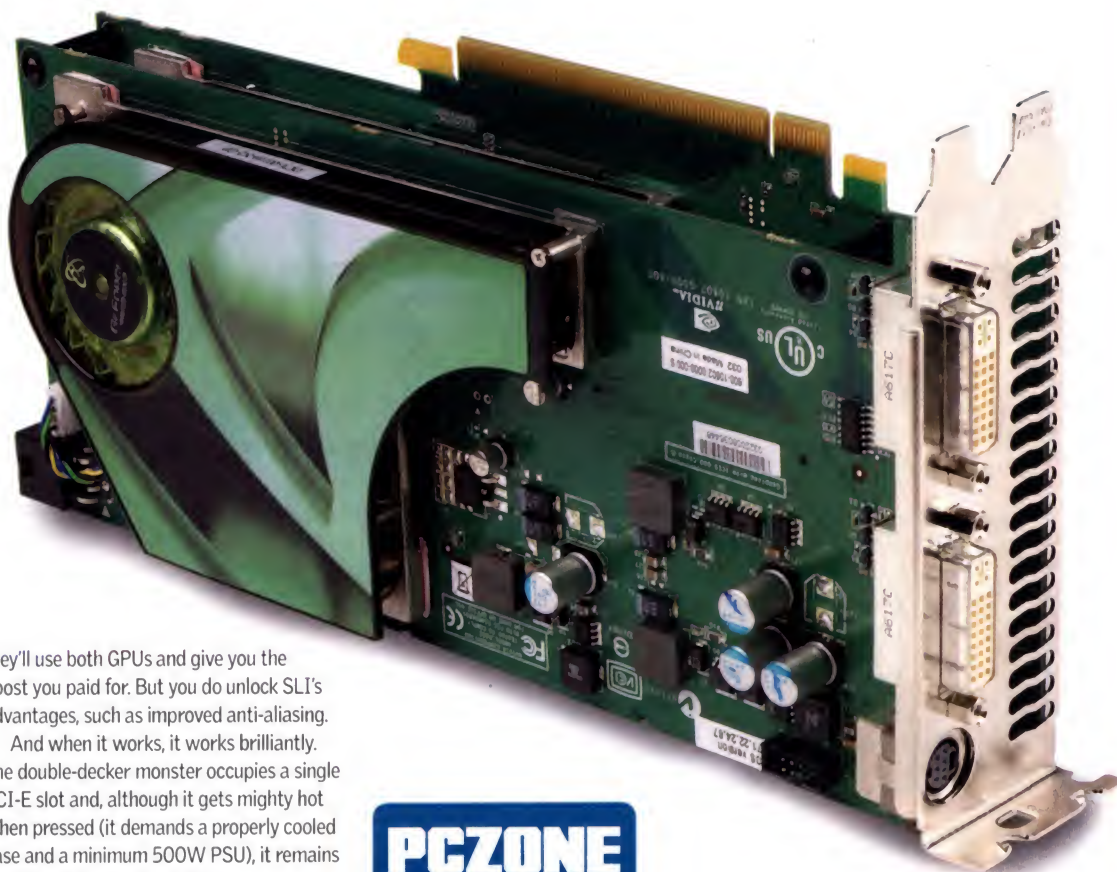
Basically, if you're after higher resolutions and better detail levels, and have money burning a hole in your pocket the size of a new laptop, a GX2 is a quick-fix alternative to ripping out the guts of your PC, dropping in an SLI-compliant motherboard and buying two video cards to go with it.

XFx's flagship is basically a G71-based Siamese twin – the lower deck is almost identical to the top, right down to XFX stickers on the cooler you can't see – with 1GB RAM and all the usual limitations of SLI. So you can't use dual screens with SLI active, and games require profiles before

they'll use both GPUs and give you the boost you paid for. But you do unlock SLI's advantages, such as improved anti-aliasing.

And when it works, it works brilliantly. The double-decker monster occupies a single PCI-E slot and, although it gets mighty hot when pressed (it demands a properly cooled case and a minimum 500W PSU), it remains eerily quiet and seriously fast.

Should you buy one? If you have a high-end rig with an FX or Core 2 Duo, the GX2 will help you get the most from all that computing power. But it does assume that the games you play support SLI, and that you have a large-format screen capable of doing the card proper justice.



PCZONE
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GEFORCE 7900 GS 480M EXTREME

PRICE £150 MANUFACTURER XFX WEBSITE www.xfxforce.co.uk

QUESTION FOR YOU. What do the X1900 XTX, X1800 XL, X850 XT, X800 GTO, X1900 XT, X1950 XTX, X1900 GT, X800 XT, X1800 XT, X800 GT all have in common?

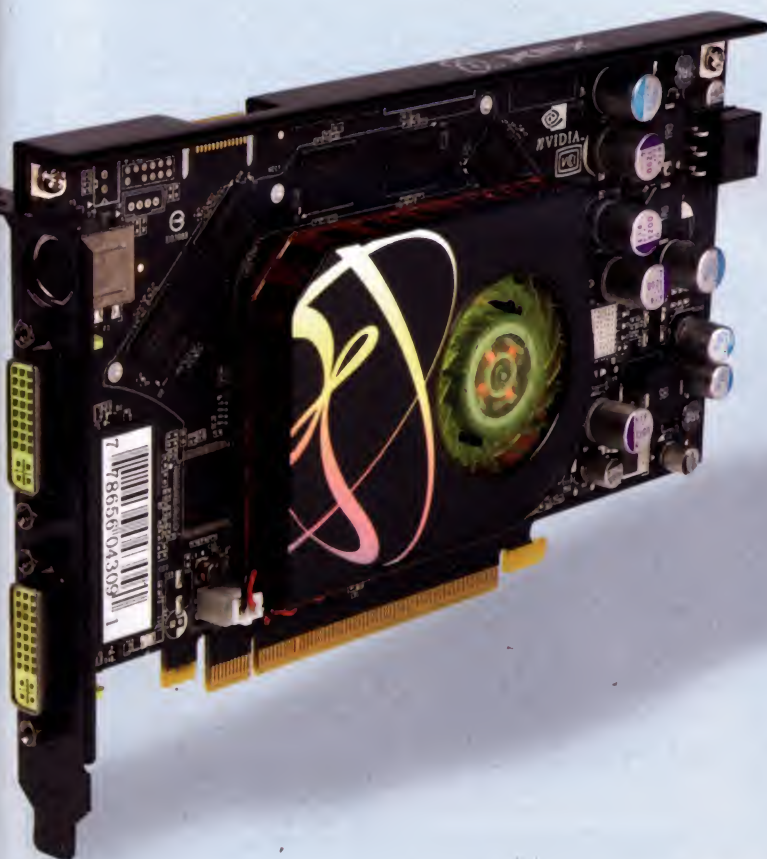
The answer is that, every day, they confuse the hell out of hardware buyers around the world. All these same-sounding models are in stock at prominent Web retailers; all offer 'unparalleled' this and 'ultra-realistic' that in exchange for not inconsequential amounts of money. In addition, there are variants, special editions and overclocked versions, all of which combine to make your next graphics purchase a total bloody nightmare.

There used to be a time – and do forgive me if I'm sounding like your dad – when you could look at a card like the 9700 Pro and know instantly where you stood with it. Nowadays, you need to refer to benchmark charts and price lists to get even half an idea of which product you actually want.

Luckily, the 7900 GS makes the decision-making easy for a good number of buyers. Here's a bantamweight GeForce which, thanks to it being pretty much a 7900 GT with a few arteries blocked off, provides heavyweight power for just £150. This particular variant, the XFX 480M Extreme, pushes the clocks further and delivers benchmark results not far removed from the GT on which it's based.

If you're in the market to spend between £100 and £150 on a PCI-E graphics card, stop fretting. Get this one.

PCZONE
91



HOW TO...

WINDOW-DRESS WINDOWS XP

Need:

Windows XP and
a Web browser

Time:

One hour

Difficulty level:

Phil Wand

Deep Blue

Medium doofus

Big Brother contestant

← Jamie Sefton

Bored looking at the same old operating system day after day? *Phil Wand* shows you how to redecorate XP for free

EVERY ONCE IN a while, we all get the urge to move furniture around, paint a wall a different colour or tear up the carpet and replace it with laminate flooring. What you might not know is that you can also redo the decoration of your PC.

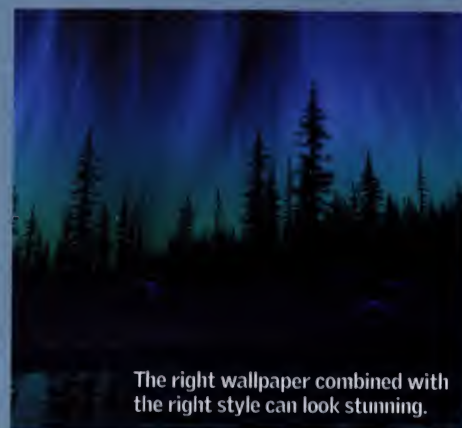
Of course, making things worse is par for the course. That crimson gloss paint and those synthetic wood tiles may have seemed a super idea when you plucked them

from the shelves at B&Q, but the reality of a blood red room with a fake parquet floor is something truly horrific.

Luckily, messing about with the way Windows looks won't cost you a dime. So once you've lived with the wallpaper that looks like a close-up on ejaculate, and have had fish swim around your screen while you're in another room, you can always put things back as they were and it won't cost you a thing.

01 Wallpapers

Created by teenagers with a hacked copy of LightWave and no talent, most wallpapers defy taste. However, there are some genuinely striking works of art out there – you just need to know where to look. Your first port of call should be www.mandelux.com, which is famous for its single, wide and multi-screen format images; at www.looroll.com and www.digitalblasphemy.com, you'll find a wide range of backgrounds. No trip would be complete without a stop at www.deviantart.com, although you'll spend hours here picking the wheat from the chaff. And last, visit www.geisswerks.com for Drepels, a 'psychotherapeutic' desktop enhancer.



A visual style or msstyle is actually a collection of files which describe how your Windows XP interface appears on-screen. It's what's known as a container format for images, fonts and other information which affect how every aspect of an operating system, even the Start Menu, presents itself. The standard Windows XP visual style is known as Luna.

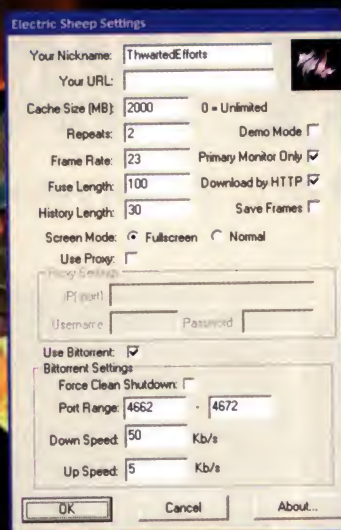
A screensaver is misleading in that it doesn't actually save anything. Indeed, it actually makes it a lot worse. Leaving your monitor on while you're not at the PC consumes a great deal of energy and will reduce the lifetime of the backlight in flat-panel displays. The best solution is to open the Power Options control panel and adjust the settings there to switch the monitor off – or better still, just hit the on/off switch each time you stand up.

02 Styles

Take a look around www.deviantart.com, www.xpthemes.com, www.lotsofskins.com and www.skinbase.org and you'll soon bump into visual styles – downloads which promise to change the way XP looks, without requiring you to buy third-party software. As with wallpaper, the overwhelming majority of styles are rubbish, but there are some real gems about. *PC ZONE* favourites include Prominence Pro and XPMC, both by Ross Harvey.

To install visual styles, you'll need to Google for Uxtheme Multi-patcher 5.0. This free tool patches your system so that you can install msstyle format extensions by simply double-clicking on them.





Open your network
and say "Baaa..."

03 Screensavers

The Electric Sheep from www.electricsheep.org chats anonymously over the Internet, sharing its dynamically-generated screensavers using BitTorrent. When your computer is idle, Sheep gives birth to a unique four-second 'life form' whose colours, shapes and movements are specified by numeric genetic code. The newborn is then distributed to other users around the globe, and can be voted up or down by them: the more popular a particular sheep is, the more it evolves. Other savers worth having include the deeply unoriginal but mesmerising Marine Aquarium from www.serenescreen.com, and 3D Realistic Fireplace from www.geliosoft.com.

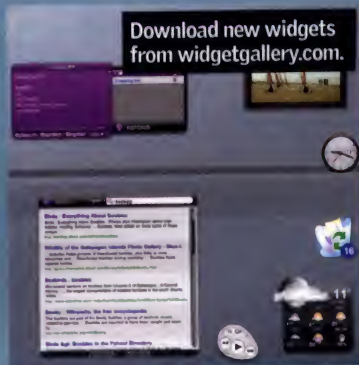
04 Widgets and monitors

A widget is a program which sits open on your desktop and provides you with interactive info, from the temperature outside to the temperature of your processor. Widgets can do almost anything: my favourite allows me to listen to Radio 2.

Yahoo! Widgets, previously known as Konfabulator, is a free download from widgets.yahoo.com. It comes with

a good selection of widgets, but you can get additional ones free at www.widgetgallery.com.

Another popular desktop tool is Samurize from www.samurize.com. Originally designed as a tool for dispensing core system information to overclockers, it's expanded to include news reports, the weather and much more besides.



Want to launch programs like a Mac user? Get out more.



Save your money: don't buy customising software



StarDock's WindowBlinds 5 is one of the world's most downloaded utilities and enables you to muck about with the way your system looks and feels. There are hundreds of thousands of styles available for download all across the Web, a few of which look passable. The majority are terrible.

Thing is, even though the WindowBlinds developer claims it's quicker than XP's own theme engine, it comes with a \$20 price tag. Early next year, you'll be looking at Windows Vista and drooling at its desktop composition engine, which has ten times more features, is ten times more exciting, and an integral part of the OS. So wait.

05 Launchers

A launcher is a third-party utility which runs in the background and gives you access to your favourite Windows games and apps, usually by presenting them to you in an easily accessible format. Both Y'z Dock from www.oxyx.oxygen-inc.com and RKLancher from home.cogeco.ca/~rklancher copy the Mac launch program and are very popular. You can change the look and behaviour of both of these; there are hundreds of theme downloads available on the Internet.

QUESTIONS QUESTIONS

Q Will these things affect the stability of my PC?

A Styles should make no difference to the way your system works, but some screensavers can be wobbly.

Q Why do I need to patch my system to open visual styles?

A The Windows theme engine was engineered to only accept styles which were digitally signed by Microsoft, and the patch gets around this.

Q I've patched my system to import visual styles.

Can I unpatch it?

A Yes, just run the patcher again.

Q Rather than continually mucking about with the Windows desktop and taskbar, can I replace the horrid things altogether?

A Yes. Have a look at colibri.letspeak.org, xoblite.net and at bb4win.org.



DEAR WANDY

If it ain't broke, don't fix it. If it ain't working, don't panic...



Problems?

We've all got them you know... Overdone it with the spray-on tan? Girlfriend wants you to go to a McFly concert with her? You're a Leeds Utd supporter? We can't help with any of those (no, not even the Mighty Wandy), but we can solve all of your hardware hassles. Wandy knows everything and is willing to help if you email him at wandy@dearwandy.com, including as much information as necessary and system specs where applicable.



Thermal paste. Great for thermal situations where paste is required.

DRIVER WATCH

MANUFACTURER	DESC	RELEASED
ATI	CATALYST 6.5	10 AUG 06
NVIDIA	FORCEWARE 91.31	23 JUN 06

SOUND

MANUFACTURER	DESC	RELEASED
Creative	SOUND BLASTER X-Fi 2090001	3 JUL 06
Creative	AUDIGY AUDIGY2	24 JAN 06
	AUDIGY 4 2080004	



Can you balance your remote like that?

CURIOSITY KILLED THE MAC

Q I've been a reader for just over a year and last week purchased a DVD drive to enjoy its contents and to play *Battlefield 2*. Once the drive was in place, I tested it by playing *BF2* for ten minutes, and with everything fine I went to tighten the screws. And then I became a little intrigued. I wanted to have a look at my processor, so I unscrewed the fan and stopped at that. I had difficulties screwing it back on, so I didn't go any further. I put my case back and returned to my game. Everything was going fine, but once the map was loaded and I clicked the 'Join' button, it crashed. Over and over again, every time I tried. The game would close, restart or I'd end up with a black screen.

Finlay MacQuarrie

A When you say that you 'unscrewed the fan', do you mean you went as far as yanking it off the processor so that you could see the chip underneath? Because if you did, you would have disturbed the layer of thermal paste which forms a sandwich layer between the CPU and the blower above it. The job of the paste – more commonly called thermal or heat sink compound – is to occupy any imperfections in the metal surfaces and thereby form a more complete connection between processor and cooler.

Whenever you separate them, the paste gets disturbed and you need to wipe both

sides and reapply it. If you don't, you'll not have a clean bond and the CPU will have a far greater tendency to overheat. That's when you start getting weird crashes and random dropouts in games, most of which demand 100% from your PC at all times.

You also said that you had difficulty putting it all back together, which leaves me with this disturbing image of your fan dangling from its bracket, and the processor surface in contact with nothing but a patchy layer of thermal compound and the air inside your case.

Please, please, open it all back up again, then remove the fan and clean its bottom with some low-residue, isopropyl alcohol or acetone-based solvent. Do the same – only with a lot more care – to the top of the processor. Apply a new layer of thermal paste with a credit card, applying the stuff thinly but evenly. Reassemble properly and enjoy *Battlefield 2*.

GRIPPER WORSHIPPER

Q I've long been a fan of your pages, and I'm glad to tell you that your rigorous approach has rubbed off.

My problem started when my broadband connection started to disconnect when I received a telephone call. I checked the connections, swapped the microfilter out, but the broadband kept falling over with every call.

Then the random disconnections and lag kicked in. I called my provider and was advised to double-check all connections: I

was told that most problems were due to hardware faults. So before I bought a new router or torched my PC, I lifted my carpet to trace every cable and – bingo! – the wire between my router and filter was impaled on a carpet gripper rod. I replaced the cable and no more disconnections. Always do the easy, obvious stuff before throwing money at it.

Stephen Graham

A When it comes to Windows PCs, which are disobedient bastards at the best of times, there's an enormous temptation to buy your way out of trouble. Broadband up the spout? Switch provider. Graphical problems? Toss out the video card. Random reboots? New computer.

When faced with something we don't understand or haven't the patience for – whether it's a computer, car or even a girlfriend – most of us will dump whatever it is that's bugging us and replace it with something new.

A recent example involved one of my neighbours. His PC could connect to the Internet fine, but he couldn't send email or browse secure websites. He'd uninstalled this, reinstalled that, had long conversations with cheap labour at Tiscali, and was on the verge of throwing a monkey at a brand-new rig.

I went through all the obvious things with him, and solved the issue by carrying his computer back to my house and swapping the DSL modem for mine. One

"I became intrigued – I wanted to look at my processor, so I unscrewed the fan. I had difficulties screwing it back on..."

Finlay MacQuarrie's words have struck fear into Wandy's heart

worked, the other didn't. And I saved him £500. In short then, think before you spend. Quite often the answer is staring right at you – and when it's not, it's probably snagged on a gripper rod...

PAVILION END

Q I want to upgrade my video card, but I don't know what to get – there's just so much on the market these days. I have a HP Pavilion Media Center TV m7330.uk with 1GB RAM, 3GHz Pentium processor and GeForce 6200SE. I have just over £120 to spend on a new card. Please help!

Daniel Humphrey

A A visit to the support section of the HP website reveals that you have a PCI-Express x16 slot. On your budget, I'd go for a Radeon X1800 GTO or, preferably, a GeForce 7600 GT – but only because it's the cheaper of the pair. If you feel you can stretch towards £150, I'd go for a Radeon X1900 GT, but in all honesty you should be hanging on to your cash for other things: 2GB RAM wouldn't go amiss. And yes, I know I've said a number of times that you don't need more than 1GB unless you're running a database server or encoding live video, but Windows Vista and modern titles like Battlefield 2 will really benefit from the extra thinking space.

ANYONE FOR A THLON?

Q My current PC is a 3.4GHz Pentium machine (overclocked to 3.57GHz), using what must be the only 775 motherboard that doesn't use DDR2 (ASUS P5GD1), 2GB OCZ RAM, Radeon X1900 XTX (also overclocked), a couple of 7200 RPM HDDs and a 600W Jeantech PSU. I know this is all good, but I get the impression that it isn't reaching its full potential and, as a Counter-Strike addict, I get annoyed when the frame-rate drops below 40.

I'd also like to overclock further, but the processor and motherboard limit me. As I use my PC mainly for gaming, is it worth

moving to AMD? I was looking at the FX-60 which can be had for around £530 and a motherboard for around £130. Would I see a significant boost in performance to warrant the expenditure?

Stuart Wright

A You'd be much better off spending £390 on a Core 2 Duo E6700 and getting an ASUS P5W DH Deluxe to host it. Pity you don't have the P5LD2 rather than the P5GD1, as a simple BIOS update allows it to accept Conroe-based processors – much cheaper and easier than a whole new board. But I shan't rub it in.

As for AMD, although the FX-60 is a great chip, it's eclipsed by the more recent Intel technology and at £530 – a whole £150 more than the E6700 – it doesn't represent the best value. In fact, it's not very good value at all.

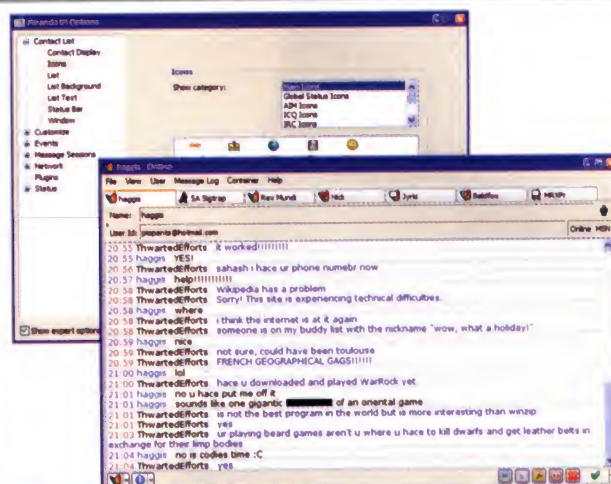
As for everything else, I'd not change a thing: your system is a truly fine spec which will have most readers rubbing their crotches longingly. You should not be getting low frame-rates in Counter-Strike unless you're running at high resolutions – you don't say what screen you have – and with the detail cranked towards stupid.

Now, I know that you're probably the type who wants to feel he can push every slider to its bump stop, but personally I'd be willing to accept a detail cut in exchange for more fluid gameplay. Having said that, an E6700 may well sort you out in this regard, and if you replace that old Jeantech with an OCZ GameXStream, you may find that it provides better stability on a high-power, dual-core, overclocked behemoth.



Are you bored of me mentioning these yet?

50 UTILITIES YOU HAVE TO USE BEFORE YOU DIE



How many instant messengers will Wandy recommend next month?

16 MIRANDA IM

COSTS FREE

FROM miranda-im.com

Wait, what's this? Another instant messenger? Not long after I suggested everyone downloaded Gaim, supposedly the best instant messenger ever in the whole wide world, amen?

Well, it was. I've been a Gaim user longer than I can recall, ever since Cerulean Studios began vomiting stupid ideas all over their once wonderful Trillian, turning it from a sleek polo pony into a fat old donkey so overfed with features that you half expect it to start eating other applications you put near it.

And then, suddenly, MSN caused Gaim to crash. But it wouldn't just throw errors, it would refuse to start other protocols – AIM, Yahoo!, whatever

networks you had defined – and then disappear from view.

A visit to the Gaim website revealed a thread of fellow users who had resorted to patching the program themselves, after a snotty message from its author made no promise of a fix but simply asked us to commiserate with one other.

Annoyed, I uninstalled it and tried Miranda IM instead. To start with, it's a nicer-looking application, familiar to any Windows user because it's shamelessly a Windows-only product and, unlike Gaim, isn't constrained by a remit to work on more than one platform. It's also much faster. And open source.

So the messenger message is, ditch Gaim. Get the lovely Miranda instead.

FORUMS:
DIRECT FROM
DEARWANDY.COM

Q: I'm looking for a new rig and I'm open to suggestions. I'm looking for fully-built and ready-to-go, because hardware is not my thing. I'm looking for a PC that'll be good enough to support Counter-Strike and Battlefield 2 at the higher end of detail. Anything up to around £1,250, but I'd like to keep it below £1,000 if possible. **A:** You're always going to have someone tell you that your choice of system builder was a poor one. You'll also run the risk of them going out of business. As long as you choose a known name and buy with a credit card, you should be OK.

W



TM

08/12/06



Here to help!

Companies pissing you off? Don't feel your voice is strong enough to shout down the suits? Email Suzy at watchdog@pczone.co.uk with the subject heading 'Watchdog', or write to her at the address above. Please remember to include your name, address and contact number, and all purchasing details such as reference and invoice numbers.



The monitor that started it all...

His 'new' monitor arrived and turned out to be a three-year-old refurbished unit that was clearly damaged...

THE ACCUSED

orange

SAMSUNG

Guilty until proven innocent

MONITORING THE SITUATION

The humble monitor. Viewing aside, it's not usually something that gets paid a lot of attention once you've bought it. Unless your name's Scott McKenzie, that is. Having bought a Samsung monitor on June 11, 2003, Scott squeezed nearly three happy years of gaming out of it until it suddenly developed a fault on June 6 this year. Thankfully, the unit came complete with a three-year manufacturer's warranty, so Scott naturally put in a call to Samsung.

After speaking to the company's customer care team and being promised that a new unit would be shipped out immediately, he was pleasantly surprised by the level of service. Until, that is, his 'new' monitor arrived and turned out to be a three-year-old refurbished unit that was clearly damaged and had no DVI input. As Scott's graphics card only supports DVI, the new monitor was completely useless to him, so he phoned Samsung again, explained the situation and sat back to await a new screen. Two weeks later, though, he'd still received nothing.

Ring up a third time, he discovered that the last person he'd spoken to hadn't actually put the request through. A few days after that, another 'new' monitor finally arrived: "A different model from the last, but again in poor condition, with

a marked screen and, of course, no DVI connection." Disappointed, Scott gave Samsung another call and expressed his frustration. They told him that the case would be reviewed and they would decide upon a suitable outcome, but four weeks later he's still without a monitor.

After hearing Scott's dilemma, we went off to see what Samsung had to say on the matter. Thankfully, our contact seemed to push things in the right direction, as the firm then offered to send out an upgraded monitor; one that actually came with a DVI connection this time. Scott was obviously happy with this and agreed to the offer, and he's now

enjoying his high-quality images once again.

MAKING THE CONNECTION

After three weeks without broadband myself, I could fully sympathise with David Wheeler when he got in touch with us over his Orange broadband problems. David's IMB line had been working perfectly for years when he suddenly lost access on July 17. After contacting tech support, he was told that the problems were due to Orange upgrading his line, even though he'd received no notification. Work was completed a day later, but David still couldn't connect. Every time he spoke to Orange, they simply demanded that he perform a line test, then informed him that he had "no line" and told him to call back in another five days.

David has now gone five weeks without any service at all, and to further complicate matters, his wife's bank card was cloned while he had no Net access.

"If we had our connection it would have been stopped after one day instead of the week that it took, by which time all the money was gone!" he says. "To add insult to injury, I was told that they would not bill my next payment as my line was not in

service, but on August 4 they took the money out of my account!"

Feeling David's unconnected pain, we got straight in touch with Orange. Thankfully, things got sorted out pretty quickly, with the firm stating: "Orange would like to apologise to Mr Wheeler for the length of time in diagnosing the problems with his broadband account and for the customer service he received during this time. Orange takes its commitment to customer service extremely seriously. We have offered Mr Wheeler compensation for the time spent without service." David is now reconnected and received a refund for two months' payment as well as three extra months' free broadband. A happy result all round.



SAINTS NOT SINNERS



Tim Jones

certainly didn't have a very good summer. After a package containing his graphics card was lost on its way to ATI in Canada for repairs (despite having been sent by insured, internationally-signed for post), he might have thought his luck couldn't get any worse. But then his Western Digital hard drive gave up on him.

However, things started to look up when Tim got in touch with WD's returns department. Within days, a new drive had been

shipped out direct from Germany via airmail – no fuss, no nonsense. Proving that bad things come in threes, he next had a flash problem with his DFI motherboard. Luckily, DFI's ultra-efficient customer service meant that within 30 minutes of submitting the complaint to tech support, they'd agreed to post him a new BIOS chip without charge. In Tim's own words: "Many thanks to Western Digital and DFI, both brilliant in my hour of need, and a boo-hiss to Royal Mail, ATI and Canadian customs."

WARHAMMER[®] MARK OF CHAOS[™]

WWW.MARKOFCHAOS.COM



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REMEMBER:
MONITORS AND
PROCESSORS ARE
LARGELY INEDIBLE

A cutting-edge graphics card will not impress most debt collectors. Always remember to leave some cash for the boring things which sustain your presence on the planet, like food and clothes.

HARDWARE DIVIDE

Want sumptuous sound, perkier pixels or a monster motherboard? Keep reading...

LOADED?

GRAPHICS

X1900 XTX

EXPECT TO PAY £371

MANUFACTURER CONNECT3D

WEBSITE www.connect3d.com

Like its GeForce 7800 GTX predecessor, our current video card champ is a reference card. It's also the fastest single device available, putting most dual-card configurations in the shade. We've chosen the Connect3D variant as it's a no-nonsense package for sensible money, making it an ideal grounding for CrossFire rigs.



PROCESSOR



CORE 2 EXTREME X6800

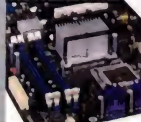
PAY £790

MAN Intel

WEB intel.com

Faster than its predecessor and faster even than any Athlon FX, Intel's new 2.93GHz Extreme processor features 1066MHz FSB, 4MB cache and LGA775 packaging. With a shorter pipeline, unique Smart Memory Access and Advanced Smart Cache technologies, its performance has people wondering what AMD can do to catch up.

MOTHERBOARD



D975XBX

EXPECT TO PAY

£150

MANUFACTURER

Intel

WEBSITE intel.com

Gamers back away from motherboards bearing the Intel logo, but you should be reassured by the name, not put off by it. The D975XBX is a genuine power-user product, with ATI CrossFire, eight USB holes, four SATA interfaces with RAID and eight-channel HD Audio. And it takes Core 2 Duo chips.

HDD



RAPTOR 150GB

EXPECT TO PAY

£175

MANUFACTURER

Western Digital

WEBSITE www.wdc.com

Travelling at 10,000rpm and with a 4.5ms seek time, the Raptor is billed as the world's fastest SATA drive. It's also now double the size, meaning you now need just one of them in your rig. But two in RAID-0 configuration will give you oodles of space and make *Battlefield 2* really fly.

SCREEN



VP930

EXPECT TO PAY

£250

MANUFACTURER

ViewSonic

WEBSITE viewsonic.co.uk

With our favourite LCD1970GX stuck at around £350, the VP930 makes more sense. It's a superb all-round performer at a fantastic price, and thanks to ViewSonic's elegant styling it looks just as commanding on your desk as the ousted NEC. It also pivots, tilts and offers 270-degrees of swivel.

SOUNDCARD



SOUND BLASTER X-FI FATALITY FPS

EXPECT TO PAY

£140

MANUFACTURER Creative Labs

WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

Slightly bonkers soundcard for audiophiles with deep pockets. Supports EAX 5.0, with 64MB X-RAM for top quality sound effects. CMSS-3D works magic on a stereo signal and makes headphone gaming crystal. Sounds nicer than an Audigy, but still painfully pricey.

SPEAKERS



Z-5500

EXPECT TO PAY

£195

MANUFACTURER

Logitech

WEBSITE www.logitech.co.uk

The price has just dropped below £200 and these speakers are simply the best we've ever tested at *PC ZONE*. They make both games and movies ravish your ears, and you'll soon find yourself blowing the dust from your old CDs and DVDs just so you can sit in the middle of the sound and revel in it.

SKINT?

GRAPHICS

7900 GS 480M

EXPECT TO PAY £150

MANUFACTURER XFX

WEBSITE xfxforce.co.uk

Choosing a graphics card is never easy, except when NVIDIA takes one of their high-end G71 cards, makes a few nips and tucks and offers it with a mid-range price tag. Make sure you get the 480M Extreme version, as this is the one with faster clocks and an easygoing overclocking nature.



PROCESSOR



CORE 2 DUO E6300

EXPECT TO PAY

£126

MANUFACTURER

Intel

WEBSITE intel.com

The 1.86GHz Allendale E6300 might be a stripped-down Conroe, but don't wrinkle your nose: it clocks up like nothing else. A smaller die and lower temperatures mean that, with the right board and the right settings, it delivers amazing performance for the money. A great entry-level buy.

MOTHERBOARD



CONROEX-FIRE-ESATA2

EXPECT TO PAY

£65

MANUFACTURER

ASRock

WEB asrock.com

Paired with an E6300, this ASRock board can help you wring high-end performance from your budget-priced rig. It features a 1066/800/533 MHz FSB, SATA II with RAID, Vista-friendly 7.1 HD audio onboard, Gigabit LAN and ASRock's easy overclocking features. It even has CrossFire support. An awful lot of features for not a lot of money.

HDD



1200JS SATA

EXPECT TO PAY

£41

MANUFACTURER

Western Digital

WEBSITE www.westerndigital.com

It's not like a 120GB hard drive is unfeasibly huge any more, but it's more than enough for the casual gamer to do a spot of casual gaming. A few good titles, a couple of hundred music files and the odd porn flick will still leave plenty of room for Windows to manoeuvre.

SCREEN



VE710S

EXPECT TO PAY

£142

MANUFACTURER

ViewSonic

WEBSITE www.viewsonic.co.uk

Not a lot of dosh buys you an awful lot of screen. The VE710S is a budget-priced 17in flat panel featuring an 8ms response time and 1280x1024 resolution and producing bright, crisp images worthy of the ViewSonic name. The company's UltraBrite technology gives rich and vivid colours in games.

SOUNDCARD



SOUND BLASTER AUDIGY 2 VALUE

EXPECT TO PAY

£32

MANUFACTURER Creative Labs

WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

If you're a casual gamer, there's little point throwing half a mortgage payment at your soundcard because you'll not be able to tell the difference. The cheap Audigy features EAX 4.0 and Dolby Digital EX support, and makes an awful lot of sense.

SPEAKERS



INSPIRE P5800

EXPECT TO PAY

£37

MANUFACTURER

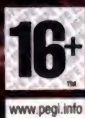
Creative

WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

You can go cheaper, but to meet the quality of the P5800 you'll need spend a lot more, as there's no better set in this price range. The subwoofer is deep and creamy, the satellites crisp and clean. A wired remote, line-in and headphone jack complete a very decent little package.

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WWW.MARKOFCHAOS.COM



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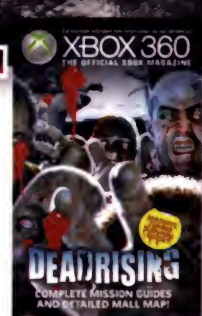
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PCZONE

FREEPLAY



Skint? Play PC games for feck all...

WHAT'S FREE THIS MONTH

FREE GAMES!

Wars? Tsk

IT'S ALL ABOUT the 'Wars' suffix this month in Freeplay.

We've got *Geometry Wars*, *GridWars* and *Guild Wars* – that's three times! More than enough to write my column about it. The first two are the shining examples used in our feature on freeware clones (p140), and the last one is the exclusive free trial of NCsoft's MMO. Do you remember when we were peddling the *World Of Warcraft* client on our DVD, hoping the free trial would get you as hopelessly addicted as us? Well, forget about that. Now we want you to try out *Guild Wars: Factions* for the price of a *nothing*.

It's different this time though, because the only financial requirement of continuing to play *Guild Wars: Factions* is the cost of the client itself. After that you can play forever, for free! This renders all analogies about drug-pushing completely incoherent. Better luck next time, analogy fans!

Steve Hogarty

Steve Hogarty, staff writer

Try this!

M-M-M-Monster!



Once you've started the 'Sink the Buccaneer' mission in *Just Cause*, head towards Provincia Don Esterno on the east of the island. Hidden in the area inside a nearby gulley is a huge, car-straddling monster truck you can use to avoid traffic jams and shout *Ace Ventura* quotes at your monitor.



Falling down.

128 Demo Pages

Try out the latest games right now!



Commie clowns.

130 Buzz

News and culture from a world of free PC gaming



Headless frowns.

134 Freeware

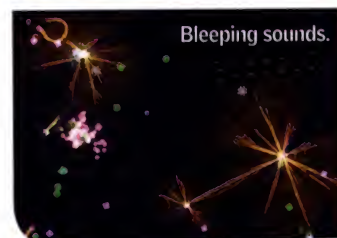
The crop-cream of free Internet gaming delivered straight to your doorstep



Tanks are around.

138 Play!

Essential reviews of the latest mods, maps and add-ons



Bleeping sounds.

140 Clone Wars

What happens when freeware steps on the toes of big developers?



Nazis abound.

144 Company Of Heroes

Go strategy-crazy with our guide to this fantastic WWII game



PCZONE
FREE-O-METER



0
HOURS

*Approximate amount of completely free stuff this month

273.9
HOURS*

Demos

On the DVD – free games galore!



Having problems getting something on our DVD to work? Phone our helpline on **01225 442244** and ask for cover-disc support. Alternatively, email support@futurenet.co.uk, including as much information as possible about your system and the nature of your problem.

GUILD WARS: FACTIONS

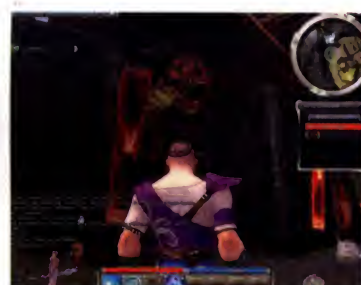
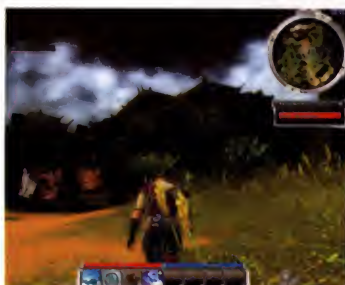
We think it's like a cross between facts and fictions www.guildwars.com

THE SECOND CAMPAIGN in the subscription-free MMORPG, released a few months back, added a new storyline and a distinctly oriental look to the world of Elona. *Nightfall's* out soon, which will see the game's design taking on a more Moroccan feel (although it'll be more like the royal city of Rabat, rather than the back-streets and aggressive carpet-salesmen of Marrakech). If you're new to the world of *Guild Wars*, you should give yourself a little freewheel with our frankly over-generous offer.

The key code on your disc will give you 14 days or ten hours, whichever expires first. That's ten hours to try out the game's new professions of Assassin and Ritualist, and ten hours ganging up on monsters and enjoying one of the least faffy approaches to the whole MMO thing.

It'll be enough to find out whether or not the game's for you, and the best thing is, if you do decide to pay, it's a one-off charge. So you won't get involved in a morbid contract with some kind of gaming ex-wife who'll keep your precious assassin from you unless you give them a

tenner a month in maintenance. And no, we don't think we're taking it all too seriously.



I, MONK

I chose to be a monk. Quite how monks and nuns escape the whole 'religious is uncool' thing is beyond me, but they somehow pull it off in a way that bishops and the Pope can only dream of. Stupid bishops.



MANTID

Hurray! It's combat training against some Mantid Hatchlings that wouldn't stand a chance if I was drunk, paralysed, pacifist and asleep. I get the cheerful feeling that this is the last time I won't feel out of my depth.



FIRST STEPS The computer holds our hand, and we hold yours. It's a surefire way to catch a cold...



THE OTHERS

And finally, I'm unleashed into a world of people controlled by other humans. Including a 14-year-old who says he'll be 15 on December 27. Poor sod must suffer with presents.



LEVEL TWO

Completing my first mission, I go up a level. Now I am Level Two. Any n00b scum had better watch out, because I'm Teddy Bung, the Level 2 Monk! I am the architect of mayhem! I am the deputy chairman of chaos!



JUST CAUSE

Just cause a revolution, please www.justcausegame.com

EVERY REVIEW YOU will read will be unnecessary. Every paragraph will be unwarranted intellectualisation of a primal experience. Every video you see can be boiled down to two essential elements; you jump around like a six-million dollar stuntman and there's tits in a volcano.

They really should have taken advice from Samuel L. Jackson, and called this game *Tits In A Volcano*. It'd be ignoring the huge titless swathes of the game which are nowhere near a volcano, but it's a damn fine name for a game.

I like to move it move it

But then, who doesn't?



FREEFALL

Here, you're falling with your legs in the air. If this seems like an undignified position to you, then remember that you're the one looking at his bum. Nobody asked you to stare at the man's bum, did they?



MOTORBIKE

Now he's on a motorbike. You'll also command helicopters, trucks and stealth bombers. All of which, you're probably thinking, would have made for a better screenshot than this motorbike. Oh, go and look at the man's bum again.

COMPANY OF HEROES

From when draft-dodging wasn't cool

www.companyofheroesgame.com

IT'S OVER 60 years since World War II ended, and the valiant chaps and lasses who showed willing to sacrifice everything for our freedom are dwindling from natural causes.

Soon, as we've been warned by Help The Aged for decades, our first-hand knowledge of the last truly heroic war will be gone forever. And once they're gone, we'll no

longer be able to rely on the confused, exaggerated stories by grandparents we actually suspected of draft-dodging.

Instead, we'll have to put our trust in European tank simulators, a half-dozen UK History documentaries suggesting Hitler kissed willies, some historians possibly, and this brilliant strategy game to remind us what it was probably like.



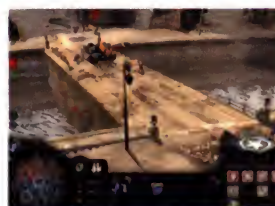
1 The map's divided up into zones – control more zones for more supplies, get more supplies for more flamethrowers.

2 Although these two tanks are ganging up on the Reich, just remember that they started it and we're the good guys.

3 Hitlers are very resilient creatures, but weak to fire and tank type Pokémon. A well-trained Hitler can comfortably beat a high-level Gyarados.

HOW IT WAS

This is how it was



Tank Attack On The Bridge

Soldiers run around in groups of six, killing enough enemies to upgrade their tanks with a machine gun.



Flamethrower

Flamethrowers are great on people, setting them on fire and then looking at them run around on fire. War is hellarious.

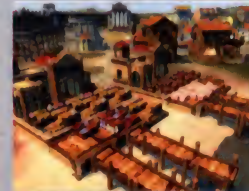
THE BEST OF THE REST



BROKEN SWORD: ANGEL OF DARKNESS

Fancy yourself as the Mayor of Puzzleopolis? Perhaps you just think nuns are brilliant, and want to play a game with nuns in. Nuns and puzzles are hot.

www.broken-sword.com



CAESAR IV

What? You don't fancy pointing at – and clicking on – nuns? Well, suit yourself. Why not try this town-building game in which you have to please the emperor, your citizens and a bunch of lightning-happy gods?

www.caesariv.com



STRONGHOLD LEGENDS

Still no? Do you think this air of detached indifference makes you more attractive? You think that if you stand there looking grumpy that games will throw themselves at you?

www.fireflyworlds.com/shl_index.php



JOINT TASK FORCE

That's it, I give up. You're clearly impossible to please. If I were you, young man, I'd take a good hard look at yourself. What are your graphics like, eh? What are your multiplayer capabilities? Eh? I thought so. Go on, piss off.

www.jointtaskforce.com

PCZONE
HOT
DOWNLOADS

F.E.A.R. EXTRACTION POINT

www.fileshack.com/file.x/9443/



Slough your way back from the mucky aftermath of the first game – back to Alma and all her stary madness – and avoid your brains being guzzled like lumpy soup from a skull tureen in this *Extraction Point* expansion pack demo.

SPACE EMPIRES V

www.strategyfirst.com/en/games/SpaceEmpiresV/downloads/



This demo lets you play the tutorial and a game of up to 100 turns. That's long enough for you to carve out a compact and bijou corner of the universe. Go fly around in space making pretty patterns! Until you can't anymore.

SNIPPETS



XNA IS A-OK

msdn.microsoft.com/directx/xna/gse

Microsoft have released their much wondered-about XNA devtools, meaning that even the lowliest of developers can take a shot at developing their dream game for free. If you want your game to work on the 360 however, you have to cough up \$99. *Space Zombies In Space* will return.

PC/360 Simulator



FLASH COMMODORE 64

osflash.org/fc64

The Commodore 64, in Flash! Who would've thought it could ever be done? Maybe in ten years time, we'll be playing PlayStation 2 games in our Web browsers every time the boss's back is turned. Of course, our bosses will be all-knowing cyborgs and we'd surely be incinerated for our disobedience, but wow!

SAVAGE WORLD

Savage, full game, now yours for nada www.s2games.com

PROBABLY TO INCREASE awareness of, and ultimately make more money from *Savage 2*, S2 Games have released the original *Savage: Battle For Newerth* completely free of charge. The cheeky buggers. Three years old, the original *Savage* is still worth a download having scored a solid 80% in issue 138.

S2 Games haven't even gotten *Savage 2* out the door yet either, so

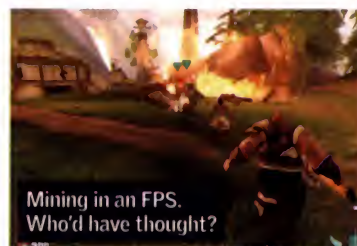
they're metaphorically letting go of one branch before grabbing another, or having penis inversion surgery before the doctor's prescribed the hormones – and they're doing it all for you. Generosity of this magnitude should not be ignored.

Head to the website above to grab a copy of the real-time strategy shooter, and take part in a savage (geddit?) battle between man and beast.

You start with little men, bows and arrows, and you end up with this...



Savage? Come on, he's quite sweet...



Mining in an FPS. Who'd have thought?



Eat your heart out, C&C: Renegade...

INSECTS APPEAL

Insects Infestation scurries into view

ii.hl2files.com | Mod for: Half-Life 2

IF ANTS WORE shoes, tiny, little shoes, this upcoming *Half-Life 2* mod would put you in those shoes. It would put you in a whole range of invertebrate footwear in fact, across three species – ants, termites and wasps – and across up to six classes.

Insects Infestation is one of the more original-looking mods out there, removing the archetypal shooty-bang-bang aspect of the genre and

replacing it with a mission to kill the enemy queen using the abilities of the insect you control. There's a load of strategic depth in here too, from base-building to evolving your insect, and erm... Manure collecting.

Not only that, it looks beautiful too, with bump-mapping effects bringing out every detail on the exoskeletons of the creatures in the world. Keep a compound eye (hah!) on this one.



Anyone fancy a brew?

1K PROJECT II

TrackMania: Sunrise goes large

www.gametrailers.com/umwatcher.php?id=12321

THIS IS THE reason it was demanded that *TrackMania: Sunrise* was part of our The Greatest Games You've (Probably) Never Played feature (p52) – this movie shows what's possible when you use the replay editor to merge the replays of 1,000 races at once.

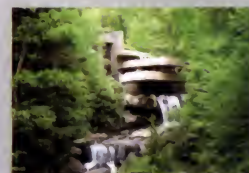
Going from order to beautiful, streamlined chaos in a matter of moments, the movie shows a flowing stream of 1,000 cars snaking about

a custom-made track, cascading over ramps and tumbling down mountain-sides. It's brilliantly and professionally edited, and set to the rhythmic beats of Moby it provides some genuine moments of awe (unlike similar efforts, which are crappily cut together and have really shit System Of A Down songs backing them). We especially like the bit with the cars, you know the bit. How long until we see Honda ripping this off?



See them fly!

SNIPPETS



FALLINGWATER

twinkl.co.za/mapvault_map.php?id=3657

Apparently this house, built on a waterfall by a renowned architect, is one of the most famous buildings in America, visited by millions of people a year – and now it's a *Half-Life 2* map. No enemies, no guns, just an architectural wonderland. We can be high-brow when we want to be you know.



MAKE SOMETHING UNREAL

www.unrealtournament2007.com

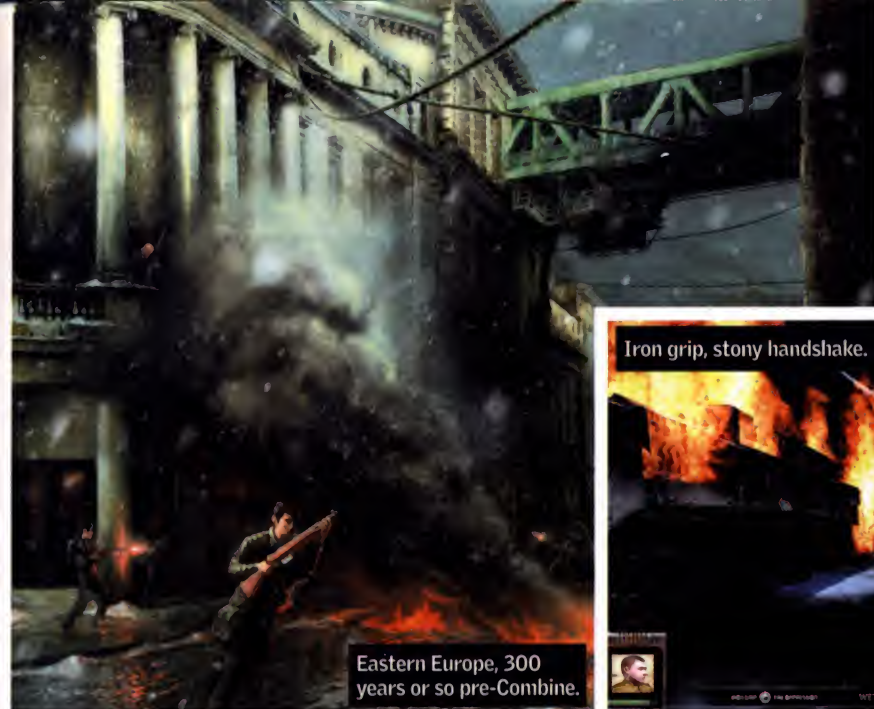
Epic have confirmed another Make Something Unreal competition for UT2007. The last was won by *Red Orchestra*, and the mod team took the \$1million prize and spent it on turning their creation into a successful commercial release.

Bug-Fix of the Month

THIS MONTH
SHIP SIMULATOR 2006



Patch 1.4 means the 'horn on the Titanic works again'. That'll help.



Iron grip, stony handshake.

Eastern Europe, 300 years or so pre-Combine.

IRON GRIP: THE OPPRESSION

We speak with the developers of one of the hottest-looking *Half-Life 2* mods around www.isotx.com | Mod for: *Half-Life 2*

PCZ: Hello. Who are you?

VG: "My name is Vincent van Geel and I'm co-founder of Isotx. I'm currently team leader, lead designer, modeller and texture artist for *Iron Grip: The Oppression*."

PCZ: What's the basic premise of *Iron Grip: The Oppression*?

VG: "*Iron Grip: The Oppression* is a total conversion for *Half-Life 2*. It features custom graphics, set in a unique universe along with innovative gameplay. The gameplay depicts one RTS player playing the General, versus a group of Resistance FPS players, who fight in a real guerrilla warfare scenario. Facing countless tanks and infantry ordered to swarm in from all sides by the RTS player, there isn't a moment without action and strategy!"

PCZ: Could you explain the game universe to us?

VG: "It's best described as a mixture between the Napoleonic era and the beginning of the industrial revolution. Technology-wise it's mostly World War II, and there's a major Eastern European/Russian mood, since the climate is mostly cold. We're currently working hard on the

back-story, history and other forms of story-telling. There's more on the way."

PCZ: How difficult is it to strike a balance between the RTS and FPS genres?

VG: "It's been extremely hard – there were countless issues, and our initial game concept crashed. We revised it to fit the gameplay better, and it now works really well. It's amazing to see how each map totally changes the gameplay, the tactics and overall strategy, which is exactly how real-world combat works. At first, the players run around trying to be Rambo, and eventually they start to see the RTS player gaining ground and winning – that's when they start working as a team.

"We've further enhanced this teamplay effect, by making each FPS character unique. As a Resistance FPS player, you choose your character from the menu, which has its own unique model and weapon-set. This also adds to the sense of realism and unorganised guerrilla set-up."

PCZ: Why don't commercial developers attempt this?

VG: "There are several reasons. First of all, technical: not all engines have the luxury of being able to blend the genres like this. Not only graphically (we had problems with the Source engine), but with network-code and physics.

"It's also an unproven genre – and in an expensive world of uncertainties, publishers are looking for certain hits. It's hard to approach a publisher and say: 'We don't know if it works, but it certainly sounds cool.'"

PCZ: How does *Iron Grip's* style affect the gameplay, in terms of vehicles and weapons?

VG: "We've mostly kept a lot of the weaponry recognisable. There's no sense in making a 234TH EXHARUTTOT kind of weapon because nobody knows what this is, and some weird design isn't going to keep people playing. We believe powerful design is in finding the perfect line of innovation, so it stays within recognisable levels. Our vehicles and weapons therefore mostly speak for themselves."

Movie of the Month RAINBOW SIX: VEGAS

This game is so smothered in post-processing video effects that it's actually quite hard to get clear screenshots of what's going on. But trust us when we say it looks astounding. Actually, why trust us? It's on the DVD...

A terrorist calmly asks for order. A nice lady complies. Who says chivalry is dead?

Peer inside hotel windows, admiring the occupants and the glass. Perverts *do* have reflections!

Here's a big waggy finger to indicate the new order system. Look at that glove-stitching...

The neon glow of Vegas has ample bloom effects, as well as opportunities for gambling.

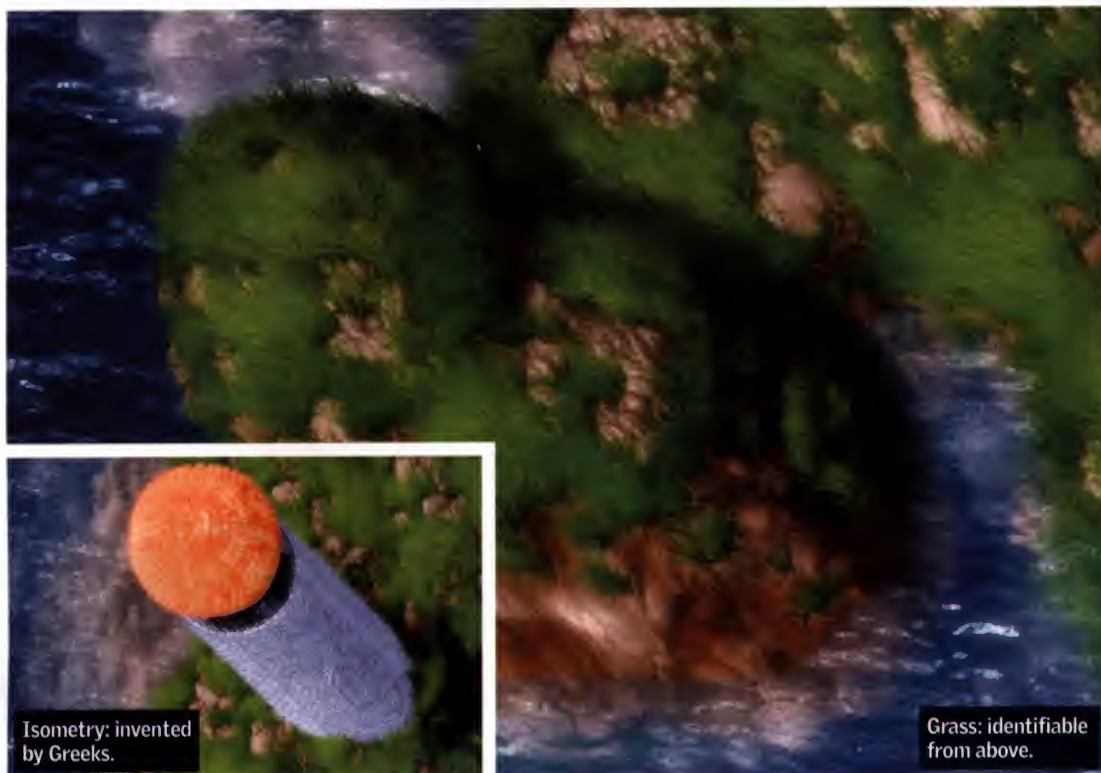
IN THE BEGINNING...

Genesis, a rebirth for MMOGs? www.playgenesis.com

THE GAMES INDUSTRY is exactly like the knitting industry. Back when knitting was first invented, people made jumpers in their houses and all was well. Then big companies came along and started mass-manufacturing jumpers, putting these 'bedroom knitters' out of business. Now knitting at home is a socially reclusive hobby, and people buy special-interest magazines which tell them how to knit a picture of Jeremy Paxman. Exactly like games.

Now one man is planning on knitting a really big homemade jumper, a MMOG jumper which everybody can play. Called *Genesis*, the MMOG will encompass every idea this guy can imagine – and he's been imagining it for some time. Somewhat off-the-wall concepts such as permanent virtual deaths, and reproducing are on the cards. With no NPCs in the game, you can assume you'll actually be born to player-controlled parents too. Or you might be a dog, who knows.

It's bonkers, and it turns traditional MMOGs upside down. It's a long way off though, so let's wait and see how free it is, and if it lives up to its immense promise.



Isometry: invented by Greeks.

Grass: identifiable from above.

ANIMAL INSTINCT

Get in touch with yours... snipurl.com/pcz_polymorph | Mod for: Oblivion

COMPLETE THE SENTENCE: 'Wouldn't it be great in *Oblivion* if you could turn into animals and...' If you replied 'stuff', well done, that's what we were thinking. This mod, which is currently in a slightly buggy test-stage freely available to download, allows you to do just that too. It's a feature which, like many of these mods, wouldn't have gone amiss in the original version of the game, as it adds a whole new layer to the already multi-layered RPG.

Imagine the basic premise, or watch the first YouTube movie link in the mod's thread above – you're in a city and you transmute into a giant spider-man creature in order to dispense terror straight into the faces of innocent civilians and guards alike. Or consider metamorphosing into a rat in order to sneak through cracks and crevices – either to reappear as a daring thief on the other side of a wall, or to escape from prison. It's going to take some extra work to make some quests which work with the polymorphing ability, but no doubt these will show up given some time.

It doesn't stop at rats and spider-men either, a whole bunch of creatures are available – horses, zombies, sheep, fish, skeletons, the scope for crazy fun here is enormous. One to keep a beady eye on we reckon.



Now you too can be a horse.



When polymorphing goes wrong.

PORTAL SPECIAL!



The new bullet-time?



Step inside, luv.

PORTAL WRENCH

Prey receives something it should already have...

prey.filefront.com/file/The_Portal_Wrench;67203 | Mod for: *Prey*

AFTER VALVE MADE everybody sit up slightly in their chairs and make a sort of a 'woah' noise (it happens), the modding community went a little bit insane trying to recreate their wonder-shooter *Portal*. First up is the game that shouldn't really have to be told how portals work, *Prey*. The

original *Prey* (from decades back) was supposed to have player-controlled portals, but they never made it to the game we play today, dramatic pause... Until now.

Still in semi-development, although you can download it and get the gist of it, *The Portal Wrench* mod turns the

bolt-tightening tool into a rudimentary portal-placing tool. At the moment there aren't any maps which make use of this new-found ability, but you can use it in single-player and multiplayer with varying degrees of success. It works with the demo too, so dig out our issue 170 DVD.



We'll never get tired of portals.

EXITED YET?

Enter *Exite*, a *HL2* portal mod

www.exitemod.com | Mod for: *Half-Life 2*

FROM THE SAME guys who developed the pilotable strider mod comes *Exite*, the first mod which seems to be getting portals right. Whereas others have failed to achieve the it's-just-like-looking-into-another-room visual effect of Valve's official portals (see right), *Exite* seems to have it nailed. Now it's more concerned with

tweaking as much fun out of the quantum anomalies as possible.

Take a look at the movies on their site, especially the multiplayer showcase. On servers with a ping of over 200, the gameplay remains fluid and effective, allowing players to place and use portals to thwart their foes. Or make a mess with crates. This is the portal mod to be following.

G-MOD PORTALS

Garry's Mod gets warpin'

www.garrysmod.org | Mod for: *Garry's Mod*

YES, THESE MODS

are for *Garry's Mod*. If you haven't noticed, the sandbox plaything has become a hotbed of user-made add-ons, which lately seem to be centred on attempts to play Valve's *Portal* before its birth. These attempts range from laughable to laudable – in fact, dig around mod sites enough and you'll even find a user-

made *Portal* gun, *Portal* cube, *Portal* turret and *Portal* map to play with.

It doesn't compare to the real thing, naturally. The portals themselves look terrible, you don't retain momentum through them and they don't feel fluid – but it's here for you to check out. Come on Valve – give us *Portal* before modders die from exhaustion.

So very almost like the real thing.



PCZONE TOP 5 FREWARE GAMES



GOLF?

www.golfquestionmark.com
A beautifully surreal and artistic rendition of the classic sport. Obscenely funny with two players and a fantastic game to boot.



N

www.harveycartel.org/metanet/n.html
Old-school platforming mixed with new-school style. Not that new schools are stylish, but *N*'s inertia-harnessing physics are gloriously entertaining.



RROOTAGE

snipurl.com/rRootage
Concentrate your fire on procedurally-generated bosses while avoiding massive amounts of bullets in what we reckon is Kenta Cho's best shooter.



NARBACULAR DROP

www.nuclearmonkeysoftware.com
Admittedly we only love this because we can't play Valve's *Portal* right away, but this mind-boggling dimensional puzzler is simply amazing to play.



CAVE STORY

agtp.romhack.net/doukutsu.html
The freeware world is riddled with side-scrolling adventures, but this one reigns supreme thanks to its massive depth and cutesy storyline.



Freeware



Steve Hogarty is married to the free

TORIBASH

No, we're not having a go at David Cameron

Dev: Hampa | www.toribash.com

Freeware is dedicated to bringing you the best free games content the Net has to offer. This month, we beat things up, just a tiny bit, then a tiny bit more, then we're ninjas, then we're bees, then we're delivering pizzas and finally we're a busty sharpshooter. All in our minds!

**FREEWARE
GAME
OF THE
MONTH**



YOU'LL JUST HAVE to excuse the clichéd introduction, but I've found it extremely difficult to tear myself away from *Toribash* in order to write a few hundred words about it – the sooner I finish telling you what an amazingly fun game it is, the sooner I can start playing it again.

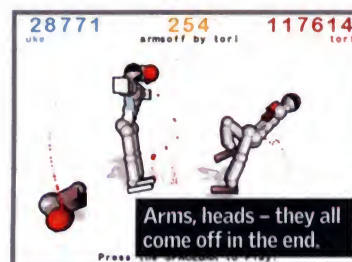
Toribash is, in effect, a turn-based fighting game in which you control one of two stickman-esque fighters. Each 'round' consists of frames of animation, and between rounds you must choose to hold, relax, contract, expand or twist one of your fighters' many joints. This is the only way of moving your character. There's no punch key, there's no jump key – you literally have to expand and contract muscles to do *anything*.

This makes even the simplest motions extremely challenging, and seeing the game's included replays dismembering

opponents with flying kicks gives you a hilarious summit to aspire to.

I've only just gotten the hang of punching (it involves pecs and elbows), and as such my attempts to compete with the thriving online community was embarrassing and short-lived – but the online option is there. Once you've inflicted your death blow, or just missed and sent yourself wheeling forwards, the challenge of just staying upright becomes the focus, as the rules dictate that only your feet and hands may touch the floor. After a set number of frames pass, the person who dealt the most damage, or the person who remained upright, wins the match.

Once the mind-boggling complexities of *Toribash* begin to make sense, a brilliantly addictive freeware game presents itself. Everybody must play this.



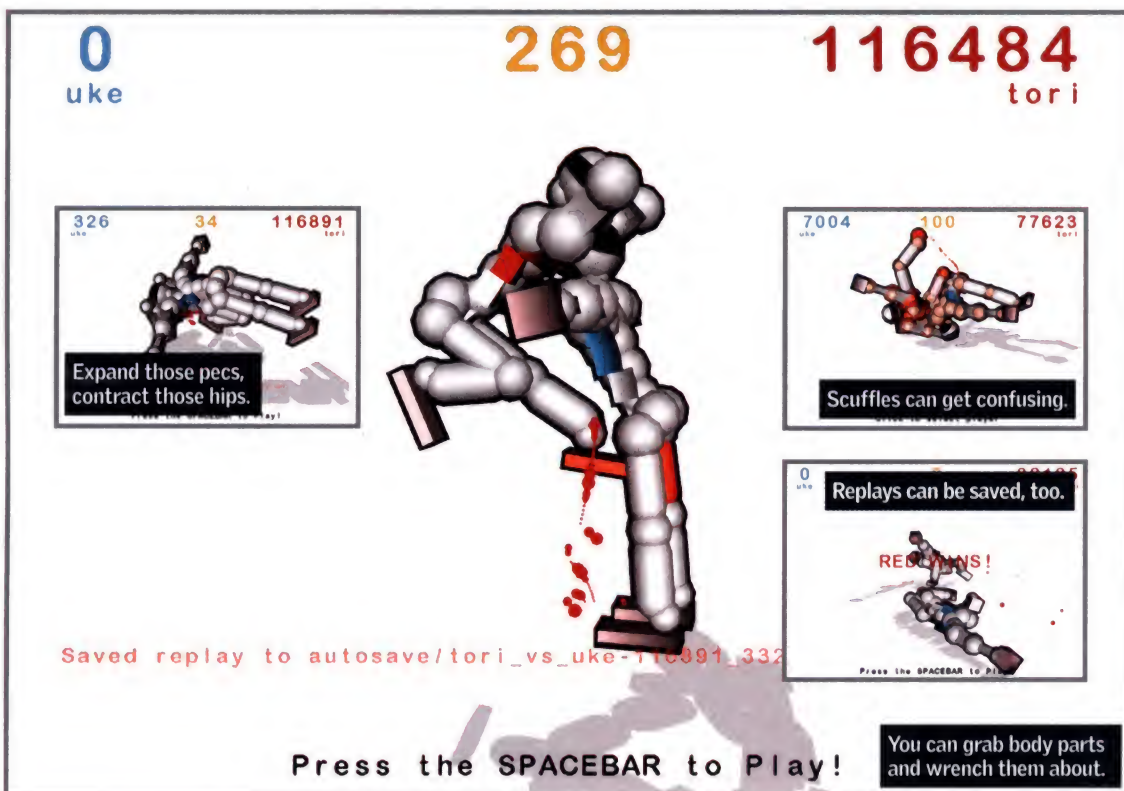
DUTY AND BEYOND

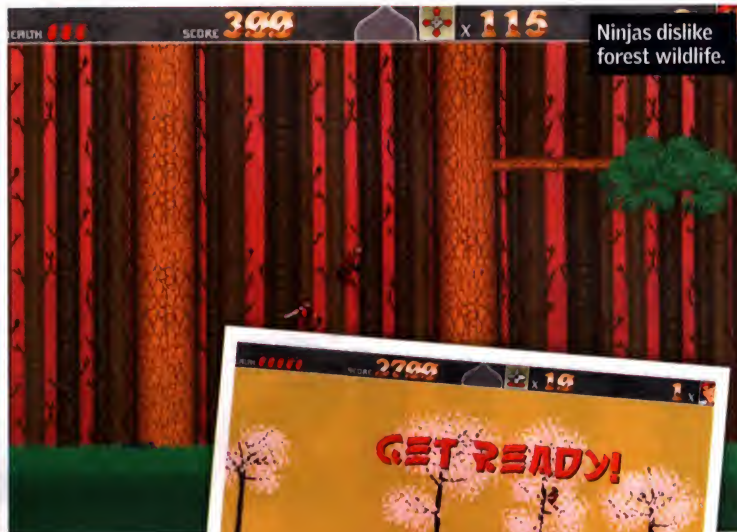
Pizza-riffic

Dev: Wandering Adventures
tinyurl.com/jrmv8

THERE AREN'T MANY pizza delivery guys who'd embark on a point-and-click adventure just to get a pizza to you. Actually, there aren't many pizza guys who wouldn't spit in your pizza, demand a tip and then chuck your pizza on the ground before driving their moped over your cat. But Piet is a good pizza delivery guy, and his point-and-click adventure leads him around one kooky mansion full of kooky puzzles and madcap antics. Yes, madcap antics!

It's fun too, with puzzles ranging from insultingly obvious to stop-playing-and-review-it-now difficult. *Duty And Beyond* is made using the Adventure Game Studio, a piece of free software for building adventure games – so check that out too if you're into that sort of thing.





LEGEND OF SHADOW

Your attention please, freeware ninjas

Dev: Darthlupi
darthlupi.com

SHWING! IT'S THE best onomatopoeic word we know of – the uncharacteristically loud and recognisable sound it makes when a ninja and/or samurai does something cool with his sword – be it disarming an opponent, making a sandwich or stabbing some guy in the torso.

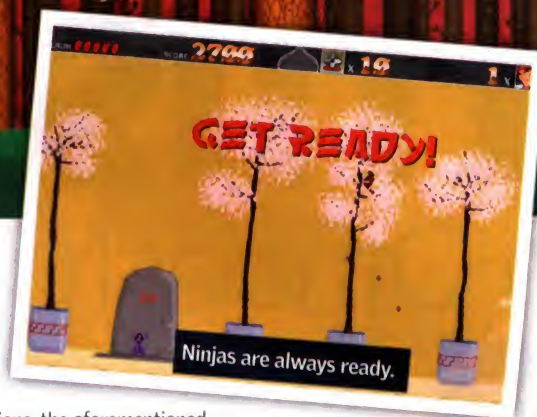
Legend Of Shadow is a side-scrolling platform-action game, and it's got an abundance of shwing – so much so that the game would be pretty average without it. As a samurai, you must run through various levels. These are typical

samurai habitats: rooftops, forests, temples – all of which are infested with ninjas attempting to take one of your precious hit-points away from you. It's extremely simple, exactly how we like it: Z swipes with your katana, X chucks a shuriken and Y jumps really, really high (or if you've got Xpadder, it all works on a gamepad).

With an endless flow of enemies streaming from their home just off the edge of the screen, surviving is a matter of perfectly timing your jumps and slashes. This results in hugely dramatic

mid-air decapitations, the aforementioned shwing and a lot of blood – two of which are features sadly lacking from most games.

There's just something fundamentally satisfying about deflecting a shuriken back at its owner, leaping into the treetops and beheading two enemies before your feet touch the ground again, even if it is in two pixelated dimensions. Better than *Ninja Gaiden*? Well no, not really – but it beats my previous favourite freeware ninja game (*Super Secret Ninja*, issue 168). Just about...



SWARM RACER

Busy, busy bumble bees

Dev: Lexaloffle | www.lexaloffle.com/swarm.php

BEES. THE LITTLE shifts seemed to be everywhere this summer, but whereas previously they were tiny enemies you trapped in cups, released in the back garden and ran away from as fast as you could before they chased you, they're now your gem-collecting buddies in *Swarm Racer*. Note that bees in the real world still hate you.

The goal of each level in *Swarm Racer* is to collect every gem as fast as possible by flying your herd of bees into them. The quicker you collect the gems, the better score you get, and in turn, the more fun you have. Bees move as a big swamy group, but leave any behind or allow too many to get trapped in the various obstacles dotted across the levels, and your capacity to harvest gems becomes somewhat diminished.

Some nice puzzle mechanics come into play in the later levels, prompting

you to split your team of bees into smaller groups to collect more gems, but for the most part this is just another way to fail to that anonymous person on the Internet whose score you'll never beat.



WEBGAME OF THE MONTH

Nobuyuki Forces 3



Dev: SKT Software | skt-products.com/contents/nobu3rd.html

This one takes a long time to load, and the words are all in Japanese, but it's worth it if you enjoy *Time Crisis*-style on-rails shooters. You're a lady with a name we can't understand, fighting against the evils of something, in order to save your one true thing. All we know is that (once you turn off your browser's pop-up blocker), spacebar brings you out of your hiding place and left-clicking shoots. Click when you're hiding to reload, and hit more than one enemy to string up mega-combo-bonus points (we understand that word at least). It's extremely well done and might be promoting something. Heck, it might even be very racist, we don't know. It might not even be Japanese. Thorough examination however, has revealed that it's great fun at least.

Nintendo®

THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE

"Every issue is crammed with Nintendo knowledge"

This Month

In Official Nintendo Magazine...

We've got more. Lots more. More news of what's going on in the Nintendo universe. More game previews and reviews. More of everything. If you buy just one (more) games mag this month, make sure it's this one. Why? Because

every issue of the **Official Nintendo Magazine** is crammed with expert Nintendo knowledge – everything you could possibly want to know about the DS, GameCube, Game Boy and Wii, upcoming games, expert tutorials on the games you're playing right

now and a look at some Nintendo classics from years gone by. Issue 09 is on sale now and comes with a fantastic free case to keep your DS or DS Lite free of scuffs and scratches. Unless it's already got some scratches. It doesn't mend them or anything.

NEWS



Every month in **ONM** we bring you the latest info on the big Nintendo happenings. And because it's official you know it's 100% accurate. No lies. No rumours. Just the facts.

FEATURES



This month we've got a killer 16-page feature on Ubisoft's eight Wii launch games, including *Splinter Cell: Double Agent* and *Far Cry Vengeance*. Plus hands-on with *Red Steel!*

PREVIEWS



Our game-packed preview section includes in-depth reports on *Mario Strikers Charged* and *Sonic And The Secret Rings* on Wii, plus *Tony Hawk's Downhill Jam* and *Yoshi's Island 2* on DS!

COMPETITION



How do you fancy winning a Wii console and a copy of *Twilight Princess* on the UK launch day? We've got TEN to give away in our exclusive **ONM** competition!

REVIEWS



Our busy review section welcomes *Micro Machines v4*, *LEGO Star Wars II* and 42 *All-Time Classics* on the DS, plus *FIFA* returns for one last outing on the GameCube.

BUYER'S GUIDE



We know what it's like to waste £40 on a rubbish game. Our mission is to make sure you never do. Our DS, GBA and GameCube Buyer's Guide has 150 Nintendo games rated!

GAME BOY | DS | GAMECUBE | Wii

Nintendo®

THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE

Exclusive Preview

Red Steel

New levels and swordplay in the
Wii game that's a cut above!

Free DS Case!

Protect your DS and DS Lite



Win A Wii!
We've Got 10 To
Give Away!

Free Case For
DS & DS Lite!

Issue 09 Out Now!

FREEPLAYPLAY!



POINT OF EXISTENCE

Steve Hogarty ponders the meaning of it all www.pointofexistence.com | Mod for: Battlefield 2

TAKE NOTE EA, here's a free add-on pack (or a mod, as we like to say in our crazy little non-commercially-driven world) which adds two new armies, 13 new maps, over 20 new vehicles and over 30 new weapons, as well as new gameplay features, all developed to extremely high standards.

That's more content than you get in these booster packs EA have been pushing out, and you don't have to pay for this either, and can download it from decent servers without an insufferable download service messing you about. Even better, it appears as a custom game so you won't get kicked off servers for not having the right content. Top marks all round – and we were starting to forget why we loved mods.

Point Of Existence is the most thorough *Battlefield 2* total conversion available,

completely blowing the £6 *Euro Force* booster pack out of the water (sorry EA), with its depiction of a near-future conflict between an uprising Ukrainian army and the resulting joint German and US response.

The Eurofighter Typhoon jet planes and panzerfausts go to the Germans, the Migs and the RPGs go to the Ukrainians – everything's been replaced with brilliantly-designed and balanced maps, vehicles and weapons, right down to the knives, hence the hefty one gig download. It's simply the best *Battlefield 2* add-on out there, commercial or otherwise, and hundreds of people are playing it right now.

Each map has been meticulously crafted, allowing, as the original maps do, for 16-64 players. Each tier of map size opens up different playing styles, and the larger maps

offer air support, while the smaller ones concentrate on infantry skirmishes.

Numerous other features make this mod feel a bit more unique, such as manually deployable counter-measures for both ground and air vehicles (if you don't know what that is, you probably don't care). There are also weak points on armoured vehicles along with the possibility of angled surfaces deflecting rockets (hurrah, imagine the frustration/relief), alternate tank rounds for different targets and two new game modes: *Nuke* and *Frontline*.

It's difficult to find any fault with this mod other than it making me ever so slightly more annoyed with EA booster packs. *Point Of Existence* is an essential download for *Battlefield 2* fans – get it in your custom games list right now.

These are grave times.

MARATHON TRILOGY

Andy Robinson refuses to call it Snickers... source.bungie.org/get/ | Mod for: Aleph One

BEFORE IT WAS launched to stardom by the original *Halo*, Bungie's baby was the lesser-known Macintosh shooter *Marathon*, which now, over 10 years after its release is no longer the gaming trump card for Mac users it used to be. Thanks to this handy program however, you too can now enjoy the Mac's gaming hurrah on your PC.

To get it running on your trusty machine, simply download *Aleph One* from the URL above, as well as any or all of the *Marathon* titles, and copy the *Aleph One* executable into the *Marathon* game folder. I couldn't do it because I'm not very clever, but Steve showed me how.

Playing as a spaceship security guard – which was a very refreshing and unique game scenario in those days – you're stuck in the middle of an alien attack that sends your space vessel into complete chaos. Switch puzzles and sprite animations come to the fore here; indeed, we spent most of our time stumbling around dark corridors

wondering what the last big button did – which is exactly what old-school shooters are all about.

Somehow, after a decade of AI advances, the flat-baddies still remain challenging, and flashing box-rooms create a great deal of atmosphere. It's worth checking out for a bit of nostalgia, and to point and laugh at Mac gamers who've now been thoroughly usurped.



Take that, sprites!



Play: **MOD**



ANTFARM: SPHERES

Jon Blyth is on the balls...

www.antfarmsource.com | Mod for: Half-Life 2

NO, VALVE PROBABLY didn't have 2D platforming action at the top of their minds when they were working on the Source engine. But that only makes us better-disposed to any mod that strives to put such undainty manacles on the beast. Get in there, Joe Hills, you dimension-stripping tyke.

After that excitable intro, it's a shame to report that the dimensional distillation hasn't been terribly elegant so far. There's no animation to speak of, your character gliding around with a gun stapled somewhere onto your body.

The action is rebels versus Combine, and everyone gets a gravity gun. Grab and fire Combine Balls at each other, gain possession of a teleporter, attack the other team's base. It all sounds simple, fun and a whimsical way to waste half an hour.

Sadly, the game's been reduced to a platformer, minus the fun elements of a platformer being added as compensation. *Codename Gordon* – the Valve-sponsored effort that didn't use the Source Engine – was by no means a masterpiece, but at least the focus was on fun. We wanted to like this more than we did – so keep working at it.



Play: **MOD**



PCZONE TOP 5 MULTIPLAYER HALF-LIFE 2 MODS



1 DYSTOPIA

This futuristic mod with *Tron*-style meta-worlds offers a new way of playing online.

2 GOLDENEYE: SOURCE

We love *GoldenEye*, and we love *HL2*, so understandably, we love this *GoldenEye* mod for *HL2*.

3 SOURCEFORTS

Spend one round building the coolest fort, and the next trying to get out of it. Brilliant.

4 THE HIDDEN

Hunt down an invisible man, or become the invisible man and terrorise the visible fools.

5 PLAN OF ATTACK

This multiplayer mod adds strategy and teamwork to the *HL2* formula.

CLONE WARS

Steve Hogarty looks at freeware crossing the line...

IMITATION. IF YOU spend enough time peering at this section of the magazine, the notion of it being the sincerest form of flattery is no doubt validated in your mind. It's what the entire games industry is built upon, with almost every original idea being taken away and wrought into something new and hopefully better – these days, it's something that's especially prevalent in freeware titles.

True originality is hard to come by anyway, and this is no more apparent than with the most imitated genre around. Fun though they may be, almost everything about current-generation shoot 'em ups is derived from the genre's past successes – sometimes more literally than developers would like.

But when does imitation turn from innocent flattery to outright thievery? Is it fine to ape the game mechanics of a popular title as long as you steer clear of copyrighted visuals, sounds and characters? Or are even intangible gameplay elements a no-go area? It's an issue that developers should be aware of – especially in the wake of recent action by Bizarre Creations, developers of Xbox 360 exclusive *Geometry Wars: Retro Evolved*, to have Mark Incitti's PC exclusive *GridWars 2* pulled from the Internet.

"We're beginning to feel the effects of the *Geometry Wars* clones on our sales via Microsoft now," begins the Bizarre Creations warning, "and are

beginning a process to start to more robustly protect our copyright and intellectual property. Therefore, I'd like to ask you in an amicable fashion to stop infringing our IP and pull the game *GridWars* from the Internet for download. I hope you understand and are able to do this without us having to take further steps."

HOW BIZARRE

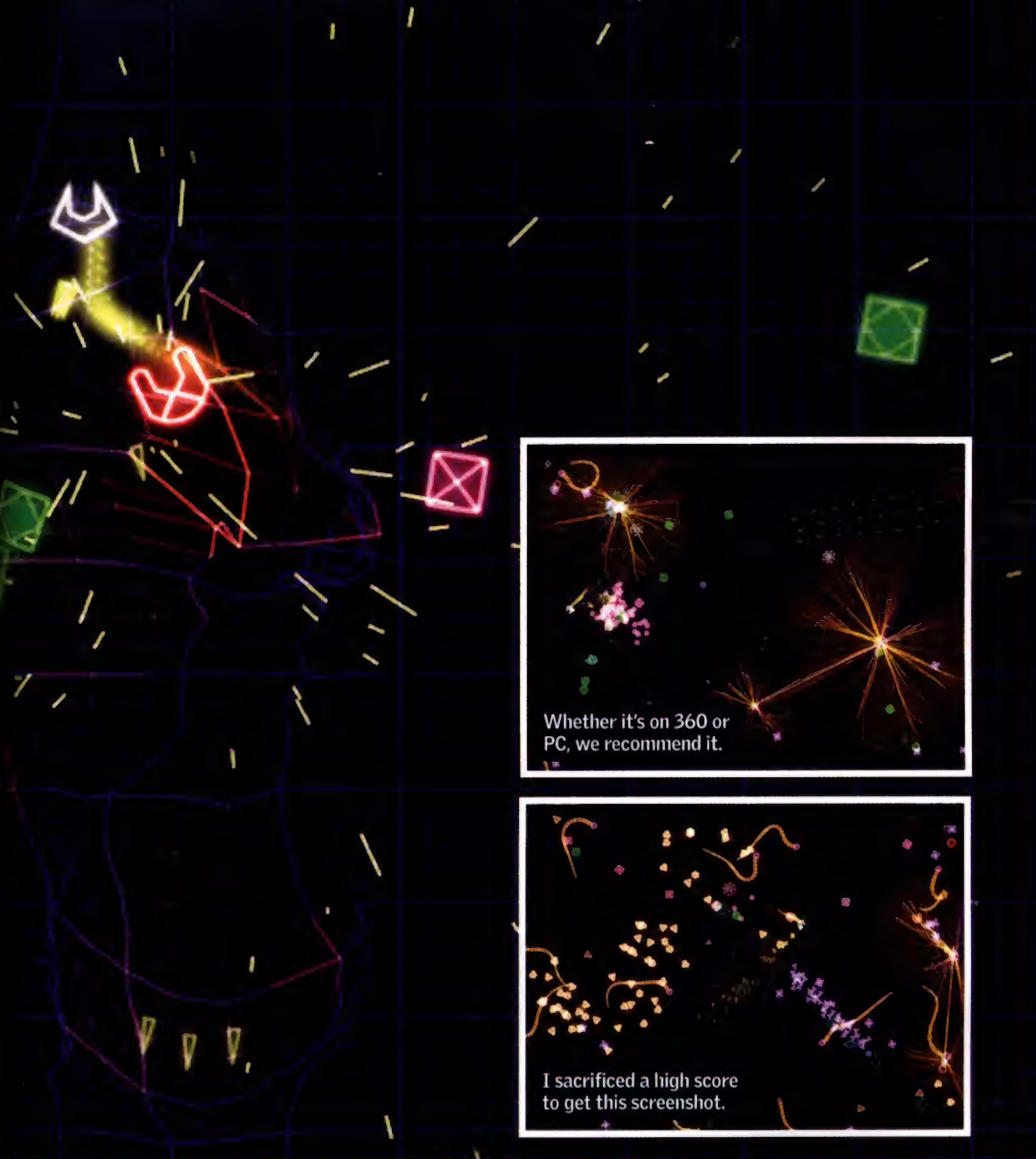
The decision to have the freeware remake removed was met with fierce response from both sides of the fence. Incitti complied with Bizarre's demands regardless. "They're trying to protect their IP, I agree with that," he confided, "but I never thought it would be negatively affecting their sales on Xbox Live Arcade, and I still don't think it does. If anything,

I think I've got many people to take a look at *Geometry Wars*."

The thought of a free, fan-made PC game potentially damaging sales of a £3 game on a different platform, especially one which allows you to play in high-definition from the comfort of your sofa is slightly barmy. However, in a later statement made through their forum, Bizarre clarified their reasoning behind the decision: "The issue that we have with the proliferation of *GW: RE* 'clone' games is their own lack of originality – particularly on the visual front."

HANG ON A MINUTE...

It was this statement that seemed to stick harshly in the throats of most freeware fans, as *Geometry Wars: Retro*



Whether it's on 360 or PC, we recommend it.



I sacrificed a high score to get this screenshot.

Evolved is hardly a bastion of originality in itself. The clue's in the title: Bizarre's shooter is merely an evolution of retro concepts, if it can even be called that.

Vector graphics and *Robotron*-style gameplay have been done many times before, just look at the oft-mentioned works of freeware developer Kenta Cho, and the classics of Atari's arcade prime. And even though *GridWars 2*, despite being dissimilar in many aspects, unashamedly looks and feels like the commercially released Xbox title (grounds enough for legal action), Bizarre's trumpeting of their own "passion for the creation of games – and the origination of new ideas and concepts" reeks of hypocrisy.

What's more, offers from Incitti to change *GridWars* enough to absolve it

from any copyright infringement apparently went unheeded.

NOT SO SOFT

"The initial emails were friendly enough, with offers to change/differentiate," explains Incitti. "Then after months of no contact, the 'please remove' letter appeared." Of course, when you have Microsoft knocking on your door with a very real case against you, backing down is probably the smart move.

"I suppose I could have held to my guns a bit better and evolved *GridWars* away from their game, thus avoiding controversy," reflects Incitti. "But how far away would have been comfortable for them?"

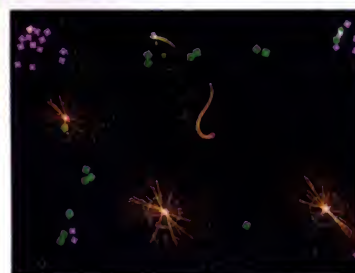
Rob Fearon of RetroRemakes.com is no stranger to freeware copyright issues. "If

"I could have evolved the game, but how far away would have been enough for them?"

Mark Incitti, developer, *GridWars 2*

Starburst

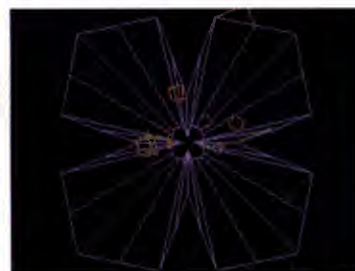
Spot the difference!



Here's *GridWars* on PC – look at all the pretty shapes and colours!



Here's *Geometry Wars* on 360 – look at all the pretty colours and shapes!



And here's Atari's *Tempest*, just as much a grandfather to both of them.

we start making game mechanics answerable within a court of law," he explains, "then you can kiss your precious industry goodbye."

SAME BUT DIFFERENT

His website has just finished accepting entries for their annual Retro Remakes competition, and he continues to extol the virtues of remaking classic games as freeware. "We don't do what we do to tread on any toes, we're not out to strip the authors of any money that they're rightfully due. Somewhere down the line, it's someone else's hard work, someone else who invested the time and effort to put fingers to keyboard and code the original game."

Fearon continues: "While we may be bringing the games back to life, we're doing this out of love for the originals – the original authors get the credit that's rightfully theirs. To me, not giving respect where it's due defeats the entire ethic of Retro Remakes."

Incitti, meanwhile, seems hopeful about a re-release of *GridWars* as soon as he's got the time, though he's currently working on a 360 title called *Polarity* – perhaps all the attention from big developers has done him some good after all. Still, if imitation truly is the sincerest form of flattery, it seems some games companies just don't know how to take a compliment. **PCZ**



Fight Club



The eleventh rule of Fight Club is... Use your crowbar!

COME AND
TAKE ON THE
ZONE STAFF IN
OUR MONTHLY
ONLINE GAMING
FREE-FOR-ALL!

GIVEN THE PC ZONE team's distinct lack of any tactical multiplayer skills, we thought that a bout of random, ridiculous scrapping in *Half-Life 2: Deathmatch* would give us a fighting chance. How wrong we were. Shortly into the chaotic toilet-throwing, rocket-launching and nightstick-battering in the first map dm_powerhouse, some serious sharpshooting from NIGHT_RIDDLED, H4cksaw and MeLee decimated the **ZONE** triumvirate of Porter, Robinson and Sefton.

As a result, the mag team turned bitterly on itself as Sefton caught Will

full-on with a filing cabinet attack. Will then went after Sefton with a crowbar, and Andy caught Sefton's barrel in mid-air and flung it back into his stupid editor's face. The multi-levelled corridors were perfect for sneaky grenade attacks and trigger-mine traps from players including BeHatch, that left piles of unwary players' corpses.

In the next map, the superb floating island of dm_Avalon, the massacre continued apace, interspersed with some beautifully balletic ragdoll bodies being blasted off the edge of the world. Sefton's spectacular fall from grace after being

dislodged from his sniping perch by thetingler was a particular highlight, as were Will's deadly gravity gun boat batterings and the impromptu crowbar/nightstick rumble, which had a dozen Fight Club aficionados running after each other like a Combine version of Benny Hill.

In anticipation of the release of our cover exclusive *Battlefield 2142*, we'll be playing *Battlefield 2* in next month's Fight Club, so start practising your USMC/MEC/China skills. Who knows, we might have learned NOT to try and board a jet-fighter taking off this time – join us on Thursday, October 19 at 6pm to find out.



Porter winds up for a low blow.



Throw, throw, throw your boat... Aggressively into someone's face.



thetingler = [icon]

NIGHT_RIDDLED - [DOA] - [icon]



Cue the Benny Hill theme tune.

Enemy: H4cksaw

AUX POWER



AND THE WINNER IS...

Free games for all! (Well, for two...)

IT'S BACK! THE Best Tag Competition, alongside the Best Screenshot competition. The thrills! The excitement! The hilarious images that look a bit like two Combine soldiers having sex! It's all just too much sometimes.

So, this issue's Best Tag is the one featuring Darth Vader in a pastel ensemble, that wouldn't look out of place in a 1980s Le Shark clothing catalogue. Unfortunately, we don't know who created this marvellous, if slightly bizarre image, so if it was you email letters@pczone.co.uk with the image to claim your prize.

Best Screenshot was sent in by **ZONE** regular MobyMatt, who captured a triumphant Superman moment as he strayed too far over the edge of the map. We'll be playing *Battlefield 2* next month, so get tagging and grabbing and send your images to fightclubscreenshots@pczone.co.uk.

BEST SCREENSHOT!



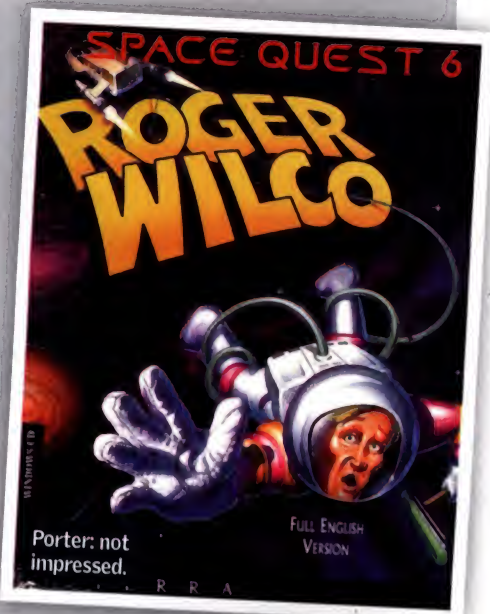
BEST TAG!



TALK ABOUT GAMES in a **ZONE** Chat? Stranger things have happened, and this month there was a definite rose-tinted glow to our IRC based ROFLS and 'I/me remembers *Grim Fandango* fondly's. After this disturbing bout of wishing we lived in 1998 came a terrifying outburst from the child in long trousers that we call Will Porter, who revealed a previously unrecorded undying hatred for the Sierra adventure games of yore. Apparently, *Space Quest* can 'f*** off and die' – but all this still comes from someone who still expresses a partiality for *Simon The Sorcerer*.

Other highlights included the now customary mIRC 'Wallace lock-out' in which Suzy's machine pretends it and the Internet have never met, and the now legendary **ZONE** Chat compo – in which Sefton doled out a *Half-Life 2* cap and a copy of *The Battle For Middle-Earth II* in exchange for a phone greeting. All in all, things were swimming along – and, what's more, not once did conversation stray towards the illicit grounds of nearly-naked women that it nearly always inevitably does.

Hooray for that then. The next Chat-a-thon will take place on Wed, October 18 at the absurd hour of 5pm. Be there or be on the way home from work/school! Or maybe having your tea.



How to join in!



If you fancy joining the **ZONE** Chat, then you'll need an IRC program and a Net connection. We recommend mIRC and you can find it on side two of our DVD. Just install the program, set the options, devise an online identity that'll make you stand out from the crowd, connect to a Quakenet server nearest to you, type /join #pcz into the command line, and hey presto, you're there! Chatting with the friendliest bunch of online readers you could hope to find. Remember, play nice and don't be rude.

Can't make Fight Club?

If you can't make it to Fight Club – perhaps you've fallen off a horse and broken your finger and are in an impossibly long queue at an NHS hospital – then join other **PCZ** readers on the following public servers. **ZONE** staff might even be there. The latest info can always be found at www.zonegames.co.uk.

WHO'S WHO

Jamie Sefton PCZ_NorthernScum
Will Porter PCZ_Batsphinx
Suzy Wallace PCZ_Uzibat
Steve Hogarty PCZ_escaped_monkey
Andy Robinson PCZ_EssexHoodlum
Phil Wand PCZ_People's Front Of Judea
Jon Blyth PCZ_Log

- 1 **SWAT 4**
swat4.zonegames.co.uk
- 2 **COUNTER-STRIKE: SOURCE**
cs1.zonegames.co.uk:27015
cs2.zonegames.co.uk:27025
cs3.zonegames.co.uk:27015
- 3 **HALF-LIFE 2: DEATHMATCH**
hl2.zonegames.co.uk:27065
- 4 **DAY OF DEFEAT: SOURCE**
dod.zonegames.co.uk:27085
- 5 **BATTLEFIELD 1942 DC MODDED**
dc.zonegames.co.uk:14567
- 6 **TEAM FORTRESS CLASSIC**
tfc.zonegames.co.uk:27045
- 7 **WOLFENSTEIN: ENEMY TERRITORY**
et.zonegames.co.uk:27960
- 8 **UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004**
ut1.zonegames.co.uk:7777
ut2.zonegames.co.uk:8888
- 9 **CALL OF DUTY**
cod.zonegames.co.uk:28960
- 10 **JOINT OPERATIONS: TYPHOON RISING**
Listed on NovaWorld

Need:

A copy of *Company Of Heroes*
A beefy PC
Some sticky-backed plastic

What you'll get:

- ✓ The tactical genius of Monty
- ✓ Big explosions
- ✓ Loads of dead Nazis
- ✗ Irrevocably traumatised by man's inhumanity to man

Invade Normandy in... Company Of Heroes

Sam Kiildsen has been called a flanker many times. At least, that's what he thinks they said...

RIGHT, SO YOU'VE just slapped down 30 of your hard-earned quids on the finest World War II RTS ever to grace god's green earth – but you're having trouble guiding Able Company through their invasion of Normandy. Your brave band of brothers is getting chewed up by MG42 fire, crisped by flamethrowers, blown to bits by mortar rounds and crushed beneath the tracks of the dreaded Tiger tank. What do you do? Well, you get tactical on their asses, that's what. Read these words and push Jerry back to Berlin...

01 SEND IN THE VETS

Things going bad in a campaign mission? Then it's time to unleash the vets. No, we're not talking about men in white coats that like to stick thermometers up cats' bottoms – we mean your hardened, experienced riflemen, snipers, mortar teams and heavy machine gun teams from previous levels. There are three levels of 'veterancy', each indicated by the number of chevrons on the unit insignia. Veterans shoot faster and more accurately and are generally all-round hard-nuts. They can be summoned by clicking the chevron icon in the Barracks or Weapons Support Center, but be warned: they'll cost you more resources than regular infantry.

02 Let's go inside

Buildings make great cover for infantry, especially snipers and machine gun teams. Stick a sharpshooter in a church tower and he'll do a passable impression of Barry Pepper's character from *Saving Private Ryan* (except thankfully without all the tedious religious nonsense). But do be careful where you garrison your precious soldiers: each building can only take so much punishment before it collapses, and that means a dusty, rocky death for any poor soul inside. When the tanks start pounding away on your building, it's time to move the men out and find a new home.

03 SALVAGE GARDEN

Building up experience points might all sound a bit beardy, but it's essential if you want to beat Fritz: not only will units gain veterancy ranks, you'll also unlock new abilities and weapons on the Company Commander trees. Killing enemies is one obvious way of building up the XP, but you can also run your tanks over the wreckage of destroyed vehicles, which somehow translates to 'salvaging' them. It'll only earn you a few XP each time you do it, but every little helps.

Two chevrons = good.

Now that's what you call forced eviction.

Bloody Sunday drivers.

04 FLANK THAT TANK

German Panzer tanks are frightening adversaries with near-impenetrable armour at the front; in a stand-up fight, they'll generally mash up your Shermans with ease. The trick is to use their relative immobility against them: use a tank to get their attention, then flank them with either anti-tank infantry or a second tank and hit their weaker side or rear armour. Not got a tank? Then try hurling sticky bombs to disable the panzer's engine and stop it in its tracks – or if you're really smart, use infantry or light vehicles to lure them into a pre-laid minefield. Kaboom!



Mechanised infantry:
the only way to travel.

05 Combine and conquer

The key to a successful advance into enemy territory is a combined, balanced force. Use Sherman tanks as the backbone, but back them up with versatile riflemen and engineers. Riflemen provide flanking abilities, while the engineers can make running repairs to your armour. As you move further, secure the territory you've captured by moving in MG teams and anti-tank guns, making sure to entrench them behind the green-indicated hard cover if possible and aiming their firing arcs at likely points of enemy counter-attack. Man, we sound like General Patton or something.

06 SNIPERS DO MORE THAN JUST SNIPE

Obviously, snipers are good at shooting, taking out an enemy with each bullet they use. Fine, but don't forget their other use: scouting. By flipping your sharpshooter into camouflage mode and instructing him to hold fire, you can sneak behind enemy lines and observe Axis positions. Then use indirect, long-range fire from Mortars, Howitzers and off-map artillery barrages, or even P47 aircraft strafing runs, to take out unsuspecting targets. Then cackle at your leisure – and use the sniper's unerring aim to pick off any surviving infantry. It's sneaky and goddamn effective, so it is.



07 Something in the air 08 FROM SMALL ACORNS...

Airborne troops are an extremely useful tool if used in the right way. These versatile squads can be dropped anywhere in the sight radius of a friendly unit; infiltrate a light vehicle or sniper behind enemy lines, then bring the paratroopers in. Not only can they be used to harass Axis weapons teams from behind, they can also capture strategic points to sever German supply lines. Equip them with recoilless rifles at the cost of 125 Munitions and they can even take on tanks, not to mention use their satchel charges to blow the living poo out of buildings.

In skirmish mode, or during the latter stages of the campaign, you get a choice between all three Commander trees, each with its own strengths and abilities. Here, you should consider two things. First, choose carefully: once you've selected a tree, you're stuck with it for the rest of the level. Second, be aware that some of the trees deliver instantly useful goodies, while others don't kick off until the latter stages of a mission. The Armor tree, for instance, eventually lets you bring in the awesome Pershing heavy tank – but it takes a lot of XP to get there. **PCZ**

Thank god for you, the wind
beneath my parachute...

The Pershing comes to those who wait.

Retro ZONE

All the world's processors, running in parallel, can't simulate innocence



MEGA DRIVE

EMULATION
OF THE
MONTH



BUT HOW?

The early '90s are a tiny download away

Gens is a great Mega Drive emulator, and it's what we used to play these games. Games that we should add we completely own, and wouldn't be entitled to play unless we did. Unless we're allowed because we're journalists. Yeah, that sounds convincing. Anyway, you might like to try Gens, or Fusion, if you want some crazy Sega multi-emulation action. As for ROMs, we're not allowed to talk about those, so stop asking. You're so illegal sometimes.

Links...

1 Gens

http://snipurl.com/pcz_megal
Gens, a dedicated Mega Drive emulator

2 Fusion

http://snipurl.com/pcz_mega2
Fusion, an emulator for loads of Sega platforms

LONG BEFORE NINTENDO kicked up a urological hoo-hah with their eyebrow-raising choice of console moniker, Sega baffled the world by giving their 32-bit console a name that sounds even soggier than Wii. Dreamcast. Even now, with nothing but fondness and respect for the machine, only senseless familiarity allows me to think the words together without wincing at the naughtiness. Dreamcast. You can't help but think that a name less flimsy might not have been their last console.

Ah, twasn't always so. Travel backwards through the velvet fire curtains of time - ignoring the Saturn, as is the tradition - and you'll wind up in the early '90s. Sega had just done an uncharacteristically sensible thing, and decided they needed a mascot. Something fast, like their console. Something that wagged a reproachful finger at the opposition, like a hedgehog.



Sonic's ace bonus level.



"I'm behind you sir. I'm killing you."

Something that... Well, you know full well what it was, so all this clumsy prick-teasing is a waste of time.

The Mega Drive became synonymous with Sonic the Hedgehog and his ever increasing gang of Scrappy Doos, and in 1993, Sega had yet to lie down and piss all over themselves with the overpriced and thoroughly mishandled launch of the Saturn, and that lovely machine with the awful name.

It's only a source of bitterness because it was upsetting to watch Sony bully them with its not-much-better but DVD-toting PS2. It's disingenuous and lazy to cast Sega as the innocent gamer victims of Sony's corporate might. But if the Dreamcast was a mournful swansong, the Mega Drive was a pissed-up sea shanty. Gentlemen - to wider-eyed times.

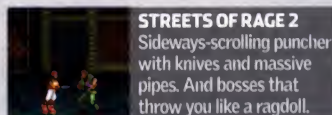
If the Dreamcast was a swansong, the Mega Drive was a pissed-up sea shanty

Fella on the left: a classic case of wasp in helmet-it-is.



SIX OF THE BEST

The half dozen Sega Mega Drive games you have to play



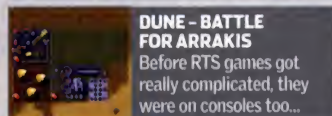
STREETS OF RAGE 2

Sideways-scrolling puncher with knives and massive pipes. And bosses that throw you like a ragdoll.



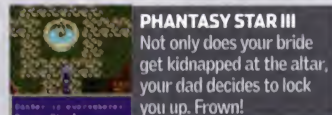
MICKEY MOUSE & THE CASTLE OF ILLUSION

Back when Disney cared. Serves Kingdom Hearts a platter of whupped ass.



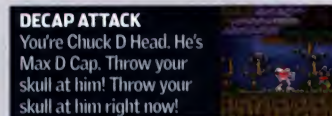
DUNE - BATTLE FOR ARRAKIS

Before RTS games got really complicated, they were on consoles too...



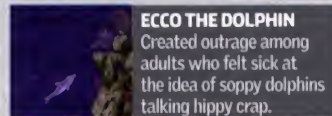
PHANTASY STAR III

Not only does your bride get kidnapped at the altar, your dad decides to lock you up. Frown!



DECAP ATTACK

You're Chuck D Head. He's Max D Cap. Throw your skull at him! Throw your skull at him right now!



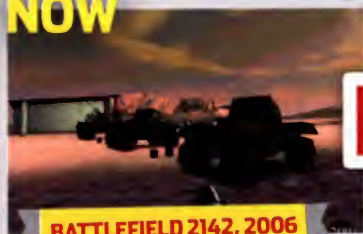
ECCO THE DOLPHIN

Created outrage among adults who felt sick at the idea of soppy dolphins talking hippy crap.

NOW & THEN

Battlefield 2142 vs Codename: Eagle

NOW



BATTLEFIELD 2142, 2006

THEN



CODENAME: EAGLE, 1999

IF GAMES COULD talk, eh? If they could bend their DVD bodies to form crude mouth shapes and flap them about like they were talking, what would they say? We know what *Codename: Eagle* would say. It would stand in the crowd at some gaming awards ceremony, just as its protégé *Battlefield 2142* sauntered down the carpet in a sea of camera flashes and audience screams, and it would shout above the din: "If it wasn't for me, you'd be dead! I am the harbinger of online FPS warfare! I made you! And I can destroy you!" It would then stumble drunkenly over the velvet rope, intending to destroy *Battlefield 2142*, before being dragged away by some men in suits.

In a limousine made of diamonds, *Battlefield 2142* would later ask: "Who was that game?" And alas, his assistant would respond: "Twas your great-grandfather, sir... Have you forgotten already?" And *Battlefield 2142* would laugh. "Great-grandfather," it'd snort, shovelling shrimp after shrimp into its DVD hole. "I have no great-grandfather."



PLAY IT!



Codename: Eagle isn't a very old game – in fact, it's only as old as a single term of Irish presidency. You can still find it on eBay and the like, but if you want to try it out we've got the demo on our DVD...

- 1 Remove DVD from whatever kind of case we've put it in this month. This is important, as the DVD won't work otherwise.
- 2 Press buttons on your PC until a sort of tray comes sliding out. Don't worry, it'll stop when it's all the way out!
- 3 Put DVD in tray. Remember, it's shiny on both sides, so there's no wrong way!
- 4 The demo is only on one side though, so the DVD might actually be in the wrong way.
- 5 Close the tray. Click through the DVD menus until you find the multiplayer demo of *Codename: Eagle*, install and off you go!



MAME FRAME

That's no red valkyrie, that's Space Sergeant Mary

Developer: Sega | Year: 1986

WHEN SEGA MADE wows with *Gauntlet*, the real innovation wasn't having four players. The real, cynical genius was making warriors and wizards of all colours lose health simply by existing. As if the maps thick with orc factories didn't cause enough damage, it was the competitive hunt for food and drink to keep your character alive that utterly undermined the co-operative play. It also guaranteed you'd keep pumping florins down the slot to get your revenge.

Quartet kept the cash-delayed mortality and magnified the competitive

co-op. The rush for the level's single jetpack, the squabble for the colour-matching power-ups. The fact that Death (*Quartet's* Baron von Blubba) seemed to pick on you, and not the other dallying team members. There were even presentation ceremonies at the end of each level, for god's sake.

Quartet may not have inspired a dark legacy and seven sorrows, but it was the reason one writer here stole cash from his dad's pub to spend Saturday mornings in the arcade. Not as popular as *Gauntlet*, maybe. But better. And in space.



QUARTET



WHAT IS MAME?

MAME is an emulator for over 6,000 arcade games, and is perfectly legal. However, on its own it's useless, and requires ROMs to play all the old coin-ops. These ROMs are copyrighted, so it's illegal to own them unless you own the arcade machine. We're not nagging, we're just letting you know.



Only a key opens the door. Open the door!



Destroy the boss. The boss has the key!

BACK IN THE DAY...



6. Driller

by Jon 'Log' Blyth

Ssssh. It's 3D. Not, not like *3D Ant Attack*. That's isometric, you idiot. No, not like *Elite*. Shut up. It's proper filled-in 3D with vanishing points, polygons and everything. Yeah, that's what I said. Polygons, yeah? Check the newspaper, man, this is 1987, and you've got filled-in polygons inside your Spectrum. Just look at that big rhombus. You can walk up to that, and it gets bigger. Just like a real rhombus. Only rhombi are shapes and these are forms. Two frames per second, my friend. Count them. One, two. Hang on, not that fast. One. Two. This is the future. This is the Freescape engine, and nothing will ever be 2D again. Don't worry about the game – it's really hard. Let's walk towards that amazing cube again.

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STEVE HILL'S NeverQuest



Steve Hill has more car trouble in *Auto Assault*...

PREVIOUSLY ON NEVERQUEST...

One man and his buggy drove around a post-apocalyptic wasteland for hours on end. Giving up in despair, he contacted a PR exec and ordered him to provide some other players for his multiplayer experience, ideally multiple players. The PR man unearthed a grand total of three willing participants, members of the mighty Orders Chaos clan. His final words: "Please be kind to us Steve..."

One of Orders Chaos stands in front of me. His name is CheezeBaal. On closer inspection, it's a woman, all futuristic metallic breastplates and shoulder pads, like a dirty goth on a Friday night in Camden. CheezeBaal is soon joined by another woman, NightReaver, a pert ginger with green boots. Nothing happens. Thankfully NightReaver breaks the silence, respectfully asking: "So Mr Hill, which publication are you associated with?"

On gleaning the required information, she's suitably impressed, the pair of them standing together and gazing upon me in wonder, the superstar journalist come to visit their humble world. A hallowed visitor from the real world, eager to learn

the ways of Nexus, where men are women and cars are heavily modified.

KNUTSFORD CITY LIMITS

"Stop touching me!" barks CheezeBaal, seemingly apropos of nothing.

"I like holding hands with you!" coos NightReaver, sidling closer to the buxom biomechanical entity.

It's not the first time I've seen two women touch each other, and hopefully not the last. But it's enough to put the frighteners on CheezeBaal, who promptly scarpers, leaving me in the arguably capable hands of her clansmate.

Eager to please, she beams: "NightReaver at your services, hated by all humans and loved by biomeks!"

Calm down dear. And it's 'at your service' not 'services'. If you were 'at my services', that would suggest that I owned a roadside facility that sold grossly overpriced food products and sealed pornographic literature. Biting my tongue, I deign not to point out this appalling grammatical oversight, and agree to go along for the ride.

"So is there anywhere in particular you'd like to go?" asks my newly installed



Who's been outvoted?

tour guide. "Show me a good time..." I murmur, enigmatically.

Surprisingly, this causes NightReaver to roll on the floor laughing, which seems a little unnecessary, especially in those boots. Hauling herself to her feet, we get into our respective vehicles and head into the unforgiving wastelands of Nexus. To collect six Hood Ornaments from Snowcrashers.

KILL THE POOR

The limitations of chatting while driving were explored last month, but again they're evident as we carry out the mission in near silence, with NightReaver steaming ahead while I bring up the rear in my glorified Volvo estate. With the Hood Ornaments safely collected, we're charged with the task of killing 12 Pike Frostbosses or Forangers, something that involves either shooting them in the face or ploughing into them in your buggy, replete with arterial spurting. It's a largely thankless task, and the formerly excitable NightReaver presumably loses interest and is never seen again.

Attempting a new mission, I'm instructed to Cleanse the Clans, something that apparently involves killing 'Derelicts'. Along with the constant slaughter of Pikes and Scavs, the whole thing seems to be some kind of exercise in social cleansing. It may be a terrifying vision of the future, but *Auto Assault* largely involves men in big cars killing derelicts, pikeys and chavs. Quite right too.

Alone and out of my depth, I find myself stuck up a Rusty Passage (which certainly is a first), where I come under attack from a Pike Sprayer in a VW Beetle. Appealing to the clan, I plead for help. Nobody comes.

ROAD TO RUIN

Orders Chaos are not few, they are legion. However, of the 50 or so members, only three are online, and none of them seem interested in coming to the aid of an infiltrator stuck up a Rusty Passage.

Again I plead: "Anyone fancy helping me?" A solitary reply comes from Tank: "What do ya need?" "To stop getting killed." "Where are you?" "Northern Perimeter. Collecting loose wires."

It seems I've stumbled into dangerous territory. By 'stumbled', I mean led there by that twat NightReaver and left for dead. Nobody's coming to get me, but with the aid of Tank and the intervention of Pakofyogurt, I'm given instructions on how to get back to safer waters.

Essentially one long pockmarked road, it's riddled with deadly foes, all intent on my demise. Stepping on the gas, I build up to almost running pace and plough my way through like Clint Eastwood in *The Gauntlet*. Bodies bounce off my windshield; chavs are crushed under my wheels and a trail of dead is left in my wake. Miraculously making it back to the town, I'm shaken, but alive.

Auto Assault Collector's Edition: one careful owner, all offers considered. **PCZ**



It's a bit like Dagenham really.

They gaze at me, a superstar journalist come to visit their humble little world

Bye bye, Mr Hill.

SPECIAL EDITION QUAKE 4

As *Quake Wars* approaches, it's time to reappraise the previous battles of Man vs Strogg. *Jamie Sefton* loves the smell of the Napalm Launcher in the morning...



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id Software/Raven
PUBLISHER Activision
WEBSITE www.quake4game.com
PRICE £49.99

IN THE BOX

Quake 4

The Making Of Quake 4 DVD documentary

Concept and production art gallery

Quake II for XP plus expansion packs *The Reckoning* and *Ground Zero*



THERE WAS NO getting away from the fact that at launch a year ago, *Quake 4* wasn't the BFG (Big F***ing Game) we all wanted. Like the Strogg, developer Raven had bolted smart new state-of-the-art machine technology onto its frame, but underneath was the familiar sight of the slightly flabby, ageing human body of *Quake*.

Recently, however, id Software announced the v1.3 patch for *Quake 4* which added a host of essential new multiplayer features, so along with a previously-released *Special Edition* complete with some interesting making-of bonuses plus a full copy of the previous epic *Quake II* and accompanying expansion packs, the game needs re-examining. The question is, 12 months on, is *Quake 4* now worthy of your attention, with other shooters such as *Prey* available to fire up?

KANE AND ABLE

Quake 4 kept its promise to provide all the thrills of *Quake III: Arena*, but unfortunately the main single-player action didn't quite match up to the series' earlier highs of *Quake II*. You play as Matthew Kane, a legendary marine who is your typical *Aliens*/*Starship Troopers* grunt, up until the point a third of the way

through the game when he's part-Stroggified in a rather distressing scene, and given extra bio-mech skills, such as being able to operate Strogg equipment.

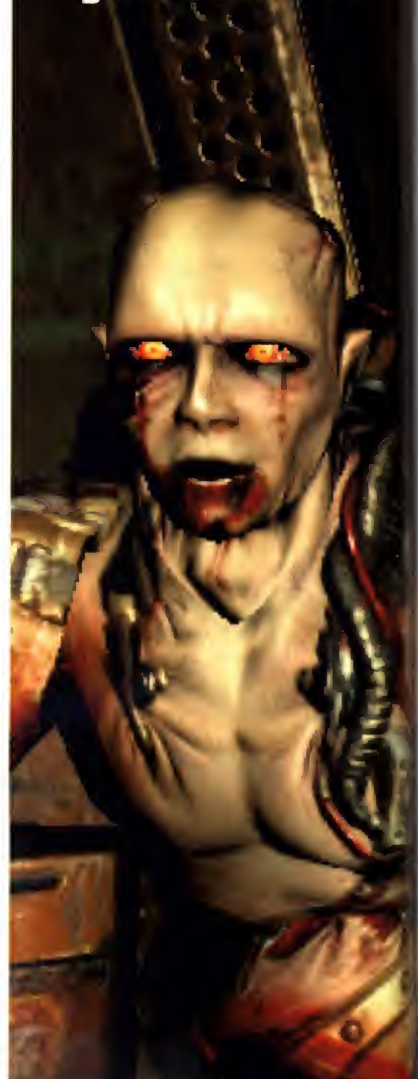
Very much an on-rails thrill ride, it's competently done with moments of considerable visceral excitement, but you get a familiar feeling of FPS déjà vu after a few hours, and the addition of squads and weapons upgrading along the way can't quite make up for it.

Fortunately, the multiplayer side of *Quake 4* is still as quick and mouse-button-itchy as ever, with the addition of the new game mode *DeadZone*, maps and Napalm Launcher weapon presented free with the version 1.3 download (see 'The Strogg - Patched!', opposite). All of which makes this an online blast you'll keep coming back to - even if you're as bad as the *PC ZONE* team at it.

The *Special Edition* also includes a copy of *Quake II*, as well as two accompanying expansion packs *The Reckoning* (developed by now-defunct Xatrix, who went on to create *Kingpin*), and *Ground Zero*. If you've attempted to get *Quake II* working with Windows XP, you'll know that it can be a little pernicky, so it's a relief that id Software has provided a fully-compatible version.

Yes, it's a ten-year-old shooter, and things have certainly moved on in terms

Quake II is a lesson in superb level design, with an immersive and atmospheric game world



Michael Jackson's enhancements had gone too far.



Quake II: visually knackered, but still a good blast.



The Strogg – patched!

Quake 4 version 1.3 adds some significant multiplayer extras



V1.3 allows you to run *Quake 4* without the DVD.

Raven and id's version 1.3 patch – released just before QuakeCon this year – really has enhanced *Quake 4*'s already-excellent multiplayer. As well as generally improved player speed and agility and a few weapon-balancing tweaks, the patch adds a brand-new team-based game type – DeadZone – that has you competing for artefacts against a rival team and holding them in a central-bordered area for point-scoring. With the action concentrated around the DeadZone, it results in some frantic and quite hilarious fire-fights, as each team desperately tries to score points while preventing the other from getting near.

A new weapon has also been introduced – the Napalm Launcher – which spits out flaming goo that burns for several seconds after firing, causing damage to anyone in the vicinity, plus eight new maps, including the *Quake* classic Retrophobopolis. Finally, Raven have now included a Buy Mode server option that allows you to purchase weapons and equipment, in a way that will be extremely familiar if you've ever played *Counter-Strike*.

of character development and use of vehicles, but *Quake II* is a lesson in superb level design, with the Strogg alien structures creating an immersive and atmospheric game world. You also get to play with the legendary BFG10K, as well as other FPS classics including the super shotgun and *Predator*-style chaingun. The expansion packs add more single-player levels set in different areas of the *Quake* universe, plus more multiplayer maps and weapons – a favourite being the trusty chainsaw, given as a default weapon in *Ground Zero*.

BEHIND THE SCENES

To finish off the *Quake 4* package, id and Raven present you with some interesting stories, artwork and interviews about the creation of *Quake 4*. *The Making Of Quake 4* looks at various aspects of development including the motion-capture of the human soldiers, the creation of the weapons and vehicles, voice recording with actors such as *Fargo*'s Peter Stormare, as well as how the terrifying final boss Makron was born kicking, screaming and Dark Matter-blasting. The behind-the-scenes footage also includes *Quake 4*'s showing at E3 2005, plus an art gallery and interviews with id Software and Raven Games. Unfortunately we couldn't find

any multi-angle movies of Paris Hilton, but we'll keep you posted...

The *Special Edition* is a decent collection – especially if you're one of the few PC gamers who's never played any *Quake* games, and want to discover more about the sci-fi bastard cousin of *Doom*. But it's the addition of the v1.3 patch that makes this ageing compilation worth a second look – certainly, not at the original ludicrous RRP price tag of £49.99, but at the time of going to press, it's now available on Amazon for just under a tenner. At that price, plus the downloaded multiplayer enhancements, id's latest is definitely worth getting in, particularly for satiating your lust for Strogg blood until *Enemy Territory: Quake Wars* is released next year. **PCZ**

THE RAVAGES OF TIME

PREY	1st
QUAKE 4	2nd
DOOM 3	3rd

In the battle of the Doom engine games, *Prey* just takes it – the multiplayer is slower and less of a blast than the imperious *Quake 4* deathmatches, but the single-player is more imaginative. *Doom 3* is now, appropriate to its number, a distant third.

SUPERTEST

ONLINE SHOOTERS



There's nothing better than shooting people. So we thought we'd discuss it...

YOUR VIEW

Last month, we talked about art direction – and here's what you thought about it...

MORROWIND

"I'd choose *Morrowind* over *Oblivion*. The latter is too generic, and the program they licensed to model the characters is crap. No beards! Most of *Morrowind* just looks alien, bar the imperial towns and Balmora. Living in a giant mushroom is cool."

Andy_Monahan

SANDS OF TIME

"I enjoyed the art direction of *Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time*, because it felt mythical, in that it was all dusty and kinda wibbly. The later *POPs* didn't have the same feel, which lost a lot of the appeal."

Psychoseal

FALLOUT

"One great PC universe that has a great style to it is the *Fallout* series. The whole pulp '50s/post-apocalypse/analogue computers/Pipboy thing serves it well, and adds buckets to the atmosphere."

buckid

XIII

"It looked very stylish... But let's face it, we all know it was a sub-standard shooter. Even Will knows that."

randomslmian

UNDYING

"*Undying* had beautiful works of art turning into horrifying works of art at the touch of a button. You can't do better than that."

TheTingler

BACK TO GRUBBY, dusty, basics this month, with a Supertest that cares not for laughter, nor for beauty. This is a Supertest that wants only to destroy, run rampage and see the limbs of its victims catapulted with unscientific force into a cartoonish heap.

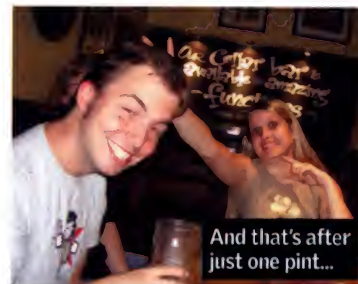
No-one could find a decent excuse not to take part this month, so all six of us piled into the Baker Street telephone box from which we phone in the Supertest. And we surprised ourselves by simply not agreeing at all.

Recent *Team Fortress* mania has gripped our Andy, who's been playing *TF Classic* at lunch. For when the day comes for the sequel, he ain't gonna be taken for no n00b. For Log, it boils down to the fact that he's unquantifiably crap, so the most important thing is being entertained. He preferred the mindless fun *Half-Life 2: Deathmatch*. Who cares if you die when you get killed by a toilet?

Suzy harked back to her first days of *UT*, in which she got pummelled by some boys, which put her off for a while before coming back to it and loving the chaotic rompiness of it all. Meanwhile, Steve was thumping the table and screaming like an acid-attack victim about how much he liked *Battlefield 2*.

No-one registered much interest in poor old *Quake*, which just goes to show how much it's gone off the boil since *Arena*, but honourable mentions were given to the more realistic games – *Ghost Recon*'s co-op mode, *Day Of Defeat* and *Red Orchestra*.

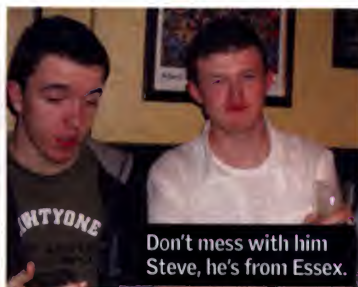
Then Jamie knocked our heads together and reminded us of *Counter-Strike*, what with it being the most popular online shooter for years. But what do you think? Listen to us on the DVD, write down why you think we're idiots, then log in to www.pczone.co.uk and register your opinions on the Supertest forum thread. Best ones go on the left.



And that's after just one pint...



Log loves Jamie. In a special way.



Don't mess with him Steve, he's from Essex.



Counter-Strike? Source!

Steve was screaming like an acid-attack victim about how much he liked *Battlefield 2*

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DEVELOPER'S COMMENTARY

HALF-LIFE 2: EPISODE ONE

Will Porter makes a 'Gordon is a moron' gag while interviewing Valve, before being horrified to discover that '70s pop outfit Jilted John never made it big state-side...



THESE DAYS, IT'S all talk of wide vistas and Strider-busters, but not long ago we were more than content with sitting in a burnt-out car and being thrown into a monstrosity of sci-fi by a happy robot dog. With this in mind, we camped in Valve's garden for a while until David Speyrer (one of Valve's head engineers, left), and Marc Laidlaw (Valve's creative mind, right) ran out with a cricket bat shouting obscenities at us. Thankfully, when they saw it was us they calmed down, came into our tent for a little while and spoke of all things episodic. Otherwise it could have been a mite nasty.



"Some ideas are crazy – but then someone says 'You know, we might be able to do that'..."

David Speyrer, engineer, Valve

"And when I bang my head on the dashboard, I want you to come to a complete stop."



02 FASTEN YOUR SEATBELT: Speyrer: "Someone will throw out a crazy idea and we'll go, 'That's crazy...' Then someone else says: 'You know, I think we might be able to do that.'"

Laidlaw: "So developers might come up with an idea like 'Let's pick up the van and throw the van across!' You respond by saying: 'Well, I don't have anything better than that. I can't top it!' Then it turns into a secret thing: 'We're going to try and get this in, because if I tried to describe it to you, you'd say it was absolutely insane.' Then they'll go off and quietly build the pieces for it."

01 NARRATIVE NARRATION: Laidlaw: "Because these games take place in real-time, it doesn't matter how big the back-story is. You have to ask yourself: 'Just how much can we tell about this thing in a one-minute scene?' We have a lot of story, but we can't ever come right out and tell you. You get a little glimpse of it when you're playing the game and hopefully that plays on and on in your mind – figuring out what the connections are between all these different things, and as time goes by the story unfolds and some of those things you speculated about will be confirmed. The pace of development means that we have to do these things in a slow fashion in terms of unrolling the entire story – but in terms of the timing of the story itself, it's all taking place in a matter of hours. It's one of those things that's wired into the foundation of the game".



03 BEHIND YOU: Laidlaw: "Stalkers have been around for a long time. They were one of the earliest creatures put into *HL2*, and we tried them in a bunch of gameplay environments. Initially, they were something that crouched down in the dark and followed you from behind; you'd turn around and see them there. We had all kinds of gameplay, but it turned out to be devoid of fun. We used them in puzzles where they could cut through sheet metal with their beams, stuff like that. It was all really scripted and stagey, so we ended up aiming for more of an emotional quality with them, to make them more of a story element."

It's not fun being a Stalker, but you do get a laser-eye. Which is OK.

04 THE NAMING OF THE ZOMBIE: Laidlaw: "We always have this issue in our games – we come up with a name for a creature, but then have to tell the gamer. I mean, how do you expose it through the characters? The team of level designers and developers are constantly dealing with this, and they had the idea that Alyx should go through the whole name-coining process we go through when we come up with a bad name for something – like a bad pun. That was just a cool incident: the team who were working on it wrote the scene. Myself and the writing team then came into it and got the pacing and the lines just right, and it ended up being the episode's most memorable part for a lot of people."



Deep down, the Zombies only want to be hugged.



Y'know, this wouldn't smell too nice, would it?

05 ALYX'S ZOMBIE IMPRESSION: Laidlaw: "I've got two writing partners who took over 'response rules'. This is the concept where halfway between level design and script, there's an area where we can influence one or two of the lines while we're playing the game, and do some pretty subtle stuff with it. For instance, when we were in the studio in session with the actress playing Alyx, I had the idea of her imitating a zombie. So we had the actress do some sounds for it, and those .wav files sat in our bin for a long time. Then I just kept saying: 'Can we hook those up?'
 "It all works according to rules in the environment: is the player in combat? How long has it been between combat moments? Are you doing anything else that's important? What direction are you looking? So that's going to be a different experience for every player. Some players will never create the perfect conditions for it to happen, and that's the kind of storytelling we really want to do more and more of – not just as a joke, but finding out how much of the story we can unfold in that way."

06 FALLING DEBRIS: Laidlaw: "We'd been playing around with particle stuff for *HL2* – like rain and snow. That was to give the impression of this constant burning really high up. I remember being in San Francisco with the Oakland fire, and I remember the ash dropping down out of the sky for days after that. You could see the fire across the bay – we had a page out of a cookbook that landed and had been carbonised."

Speyrer: "I remember the reference that they were using for that whole art pass; the orange ruddy light. And it was all mostly from forest fires – how the sun filters through those clouds of smoke."

Pretty, in an apocalyptic kind of way.

Alyx doubted that she'd be able to have another go on the Pirate Ship ride.

07 TRAIN RIDE FROM HELL: Speyrer: "We were talking about the dynamic range of emotion that our characters can convey, and we hadn't really done anything super-big in terms of an emotional reaction from a character in *HL2*. The acting system from a technology standpoint was new to us, so we didn't know – we tried to play it safe and succeed in what we knew we could succeed

at in terms of emotional expression. Then in *Episode One*, we wanted to see a character really freaking out, getting truly terrified."

Laidlaw: "It was really hard to get the balance right. People talk about the Zombine joke, but that was the key scene for us – showing what it takes to scare Alyx. We tried a lot of different versions of that scene."

Just a... Little bit... Closer...

HEALTH 99

SUIT 3

"We played around with particle stuff for *HL2* – I remember the Oakland fire in San Francisco, and ash dropped out of the sky for days after that"

Marc Laidlaw, Valve

09 THE EPISODIC RISE OF THE VORTIGAUNT: Speyrer: "Early storyline decisions were to have them all involved in the city, integrated into human society and kept in place by the Combine. We were never able to get the resources to get any of this to work though, what with all the city combat."

Laidlaw: "There were hardly any Vortigaunts in the city in *HL2*, so we were like, 'OK, they're all outside of the city' – and there's a reason they're all there. So as we move out of the city, we can finally bring the Vortigaunts in and play up their role in the world. So that's another example of how we keep story elements hanging out there, until finally the time is right to really develop it."

Speyrer: "In the original *HL2* there's a dead Vortigaunt in the prison who looks like he's been tortured to death. Well, in late *HL2* development, he was alive. He was just sitting in his cell: you would let him out and he'd start running around fighting antlions with you. Everyone thought it was really cool, but it was too late to bite off all that work; making him an ally, making him play the game alongside you. We bookmarked it as something we should be doing, as we will in *Episode Two*. We always thought the Vort would be a fruitful character to develop." **PCZ**

08 SNIPER ALYX: Speyrer: "At the end of *HL2* we had a grab-bag of ideas, and we used it to seed what we decided to work on for *Episode One*. One of the things from that was just a line: 'Friendly sniper'. It got picked, then of course we had to do all these permutations of how we could help and co-operate with this friendly sniper. I'm really glad we did keep track of those ideas, as they're always really valuable."

Reports of Vortigaunts and happy-slapping have been on the rise.

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PCZONE.CO.UK Editor: John Houlahan 020 7042 4311
Hardware Photography: In-house
Origination: ColourFlow 020 7323 0022
Printed in the UK by Southern Print
Distribution: Marketforce (UK)

MECHS

Publisher: James Ashton Tyler
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Production Manager: Rose Griffiths
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Distributed by Marketforce (UK) Ltd, 5th Floor, Low
Rise Building, Kings Reach Tower, Stamford Street,
London, SE1 9LS. Tel 0207 633 3300

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Registered office: Future Publishing Ltd, Beaufort Court,
30 Monmouth Street, Bath, BA1 2BW www.futureplc.com

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On sale Thursday, November 9. Happy birthday to Alessandro Del
Piero, Roger McGough and Aussie songstress Delta Goodrem!



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this magazine please recycle it.

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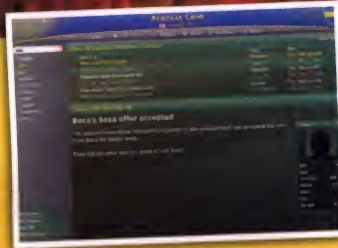
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PC ZONE PRESENTS... *Lost gaming artefacts #225*

GORDON FREEMAN'S CHOOSE YOUR OWN ADVENTURE

1. It's your first day at work at the Black Mesa facility, and you've been told to put on your suit and head to the testing room. Everyone's very excited about a crystal that needs pushing into a little slot, and they all reckon you're the guy for the job. They're really going out of their way to make you feel welcome – just 20 minutes after arriving, you're already on crystal-pushing duties! You're so excited, your hands are trembling. ~ Do you head to the test chamber? Turn to 21.
Or nip for a fag to calm your nerves? Turn to 23.

2. G-Man appears and says: "Hello mister, wanna go on a motorbike?" He's got a really big motorbike and it looks dead fast. "Come on, mister! I ain't got all bleedin' day!" He revs twice as though to emphasise the urgency, then does a really big wheelie that makes a couple of lady Vortigaunts swoon.
Do you get on the motorbike and ride around the Antarctic, trying to score points by doing cool tricks? Turn to 180.
If you don't, turn to 263, where he will kill you.

3. Reasoning that stealing stuff is a brilliant way to become the owner of new things, you go through your new colleagues' lockers. They're all locked. It galls you to think that you work in a place where nobody trusts each other. Looks like you'll just have to kill and pickpocket a few people instead. It's never easy, is it?
Do you harass the two men having a shit? Turn to 42.
Do you flash your torch at the wall for a while?
Turn to 22.
Or do you go and push the crystal into its hole in the test chamber? Turn to 21.

41. After a series of ever-more unlikely situations and decisions, you find yourself chasing a horse along a greasy stretch of tarpaulin. A number of French butchers are shaking their fists at you – and looking ahead, you can see why – the horse has a long link of sausages trailing from his mouth! Do you retrieve the sausages and return them to the French butchers?
Turn to 742.
Do you mount the horse and ride him into a tree? Turn to 678.
If you have a wasp's nest and wish to use it, turn to 572.

42. You knock on the door for a few seconds. Although you don't really need to go to the toilet, no-one can justify the amount of time those two scientists are taking to finish off. After some uncomfortable coughing, they tell you that the anomalous readings are well within expected parameters. Sounds like a couple of scientists had some spicy food yesterday. You decide to leave them to it.
Do you flash your torch at the wall for a while? Turn to 22.
Or do you push the crystal into its hole in the test chamber? Turn to 21.

43. Sitting down on some debris that just fell from the ceiling of the test chamber (actually, you're standing in front of some debris and crouching, but it's as good as), you have a little think about what's happened. Then a headcrab comes and sits on your mouth.
Do you have a crowbar? If not, the parasitical beast turns you into a zombie. Your adventure ends here. If you do, club yourself in the face until it falls off and turn to 119.

21. Cheerfully ignoring the exploding panels and the portentous comments of everyone around you, you go to the test chamber, turn on the rotors and push the trolley into that beam of light that you walked into before and which instantly killed you. To cut a long story short, everything goes mental and you open a portal to another universe through which Earth will eventually be overrun and conquered.
Do you look around for a crowbar? Turn to 119.
Or, do you sit down and have a little think about what you've done?
Turn to 43.

22. Haha! Your suit has a light in it. You shine it on the wall. Then turn it off. Then turn it on again until the battery runs out. Then you wait for it to recharge and flash it on and off on the wall again. Torches are brilliant! And your suit has one in it! To celebrate, you turn your torch on, spin around and crouch and jump, and everyone agrees you're the best theoretical physicist EVER. A scientist guy approaches you. "They're waiting for you, Gordon. In the test chamber."
Do you go and push the crystal into its hole in the test chamber?
Turn to 21.
Or do you run off to bother the two men having a shit? Turn to 42.

23. You walk into the locker room to smoke a cigarette. There sure are a lot of lockers here. And with everyone in the test chamber going mental about that new super-pure test sample, it looks like you might have the opportunity to go through some lockers.
Do you stub your fag out and return to the test chamber? Turn to 21.
Or do you go through everyone's lockers and nick everything? Turn to 3.

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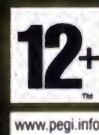
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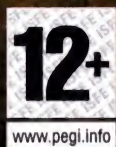
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